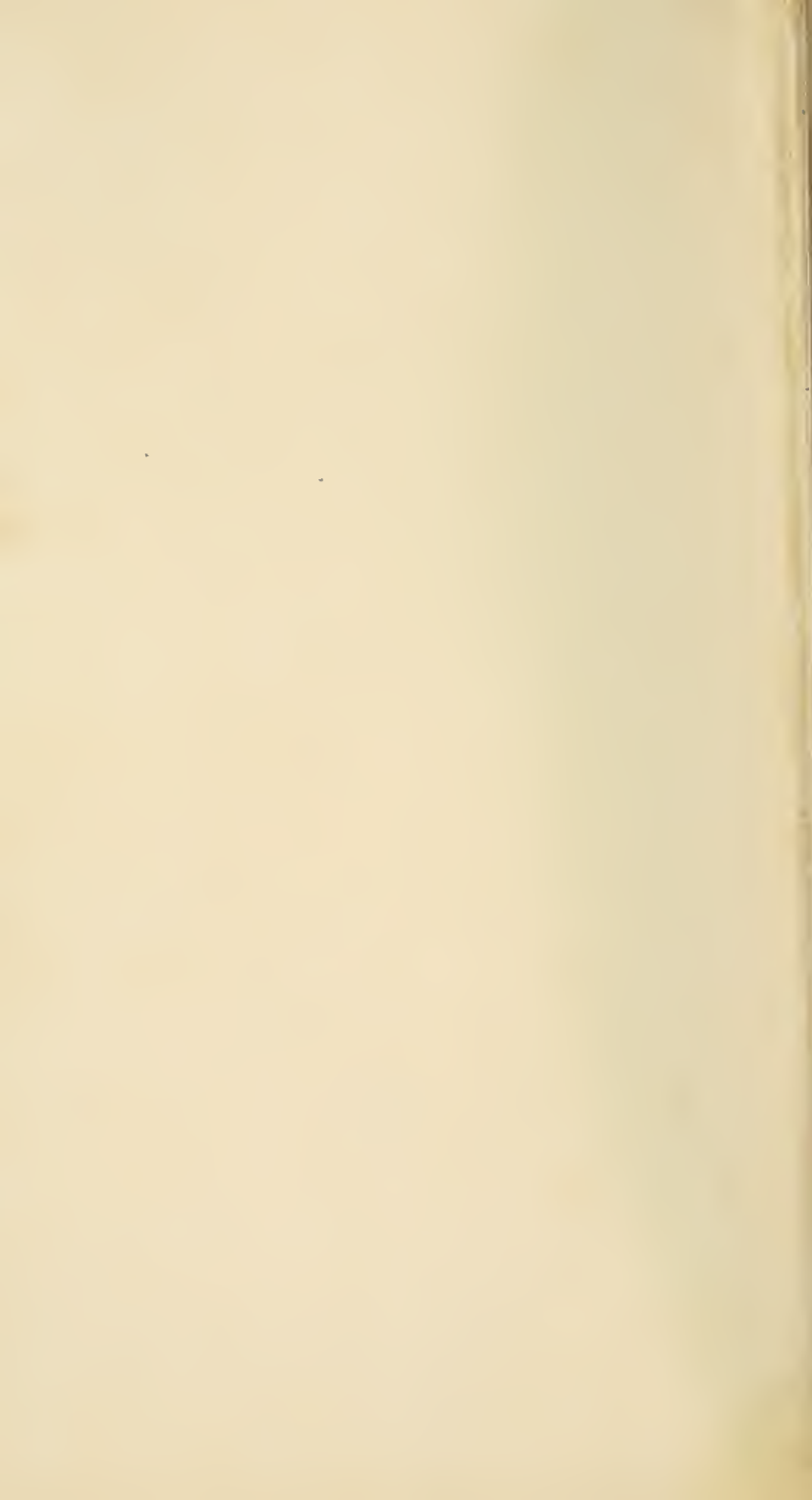
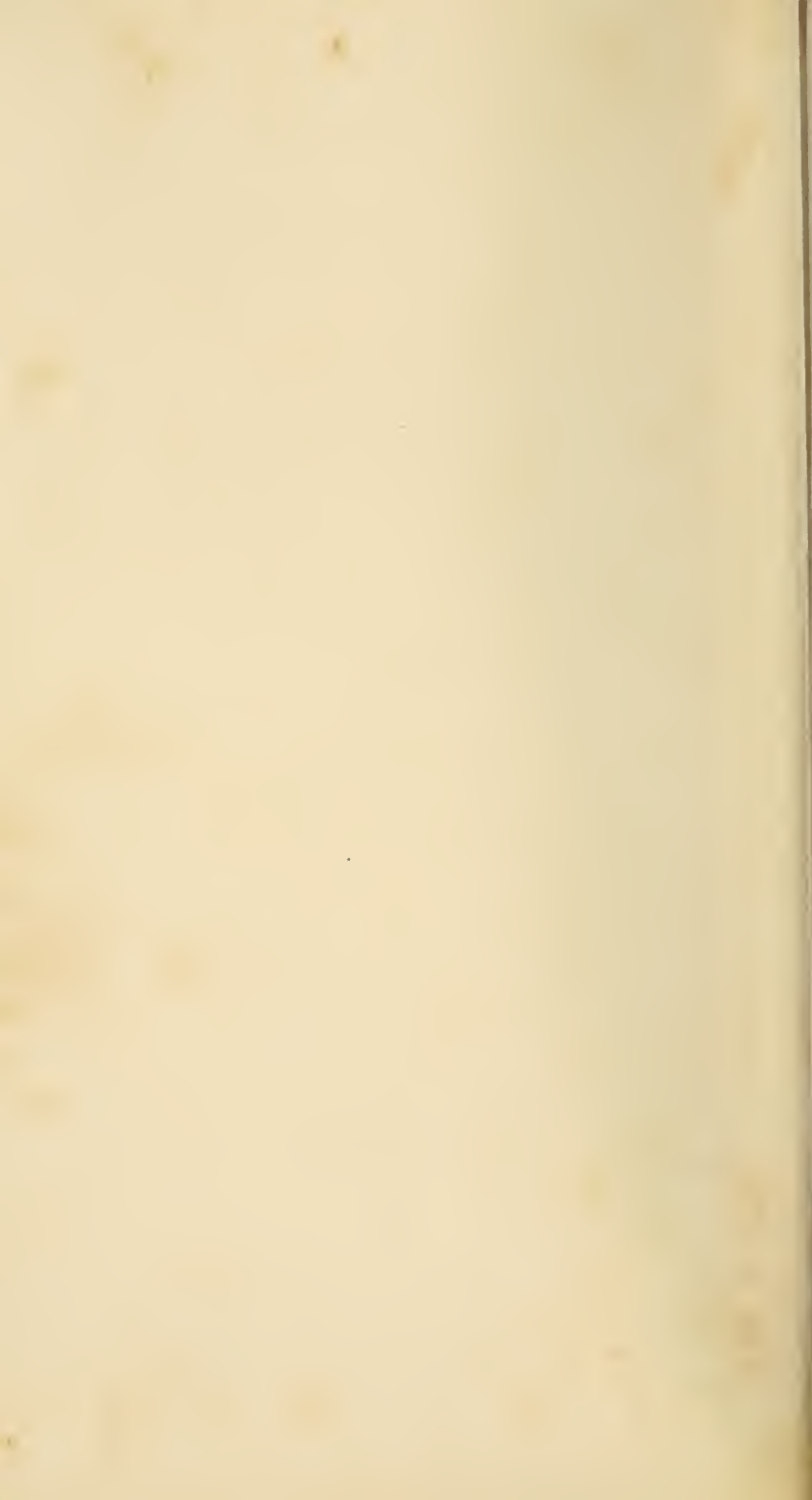


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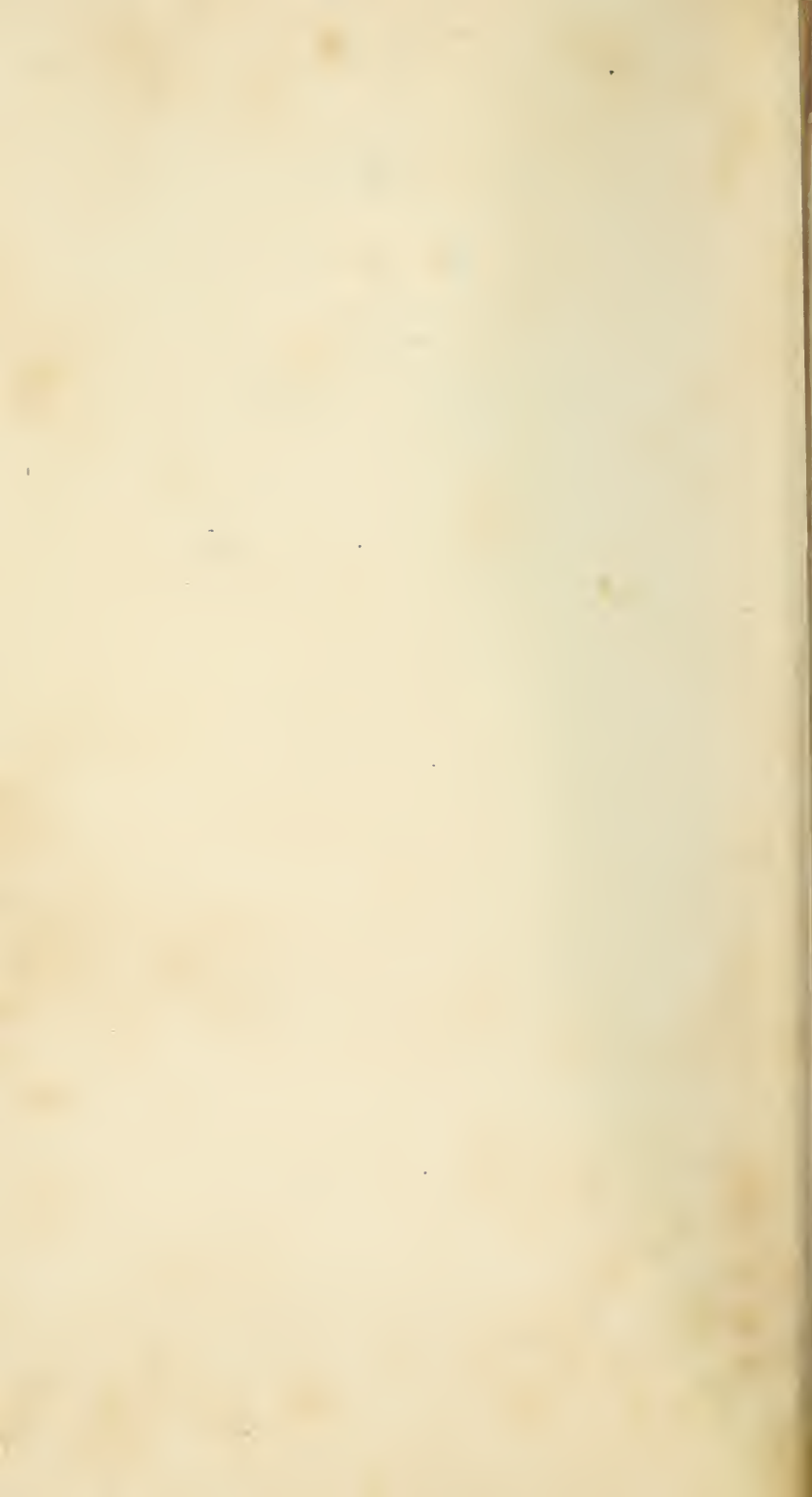
to

M^r. J. Barne

by

The Author

3 March 1836



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C. K. OGDEN

I O N;
A T R A G E D Y,
IN FIVE ACTS.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED
A FEW SONNETS

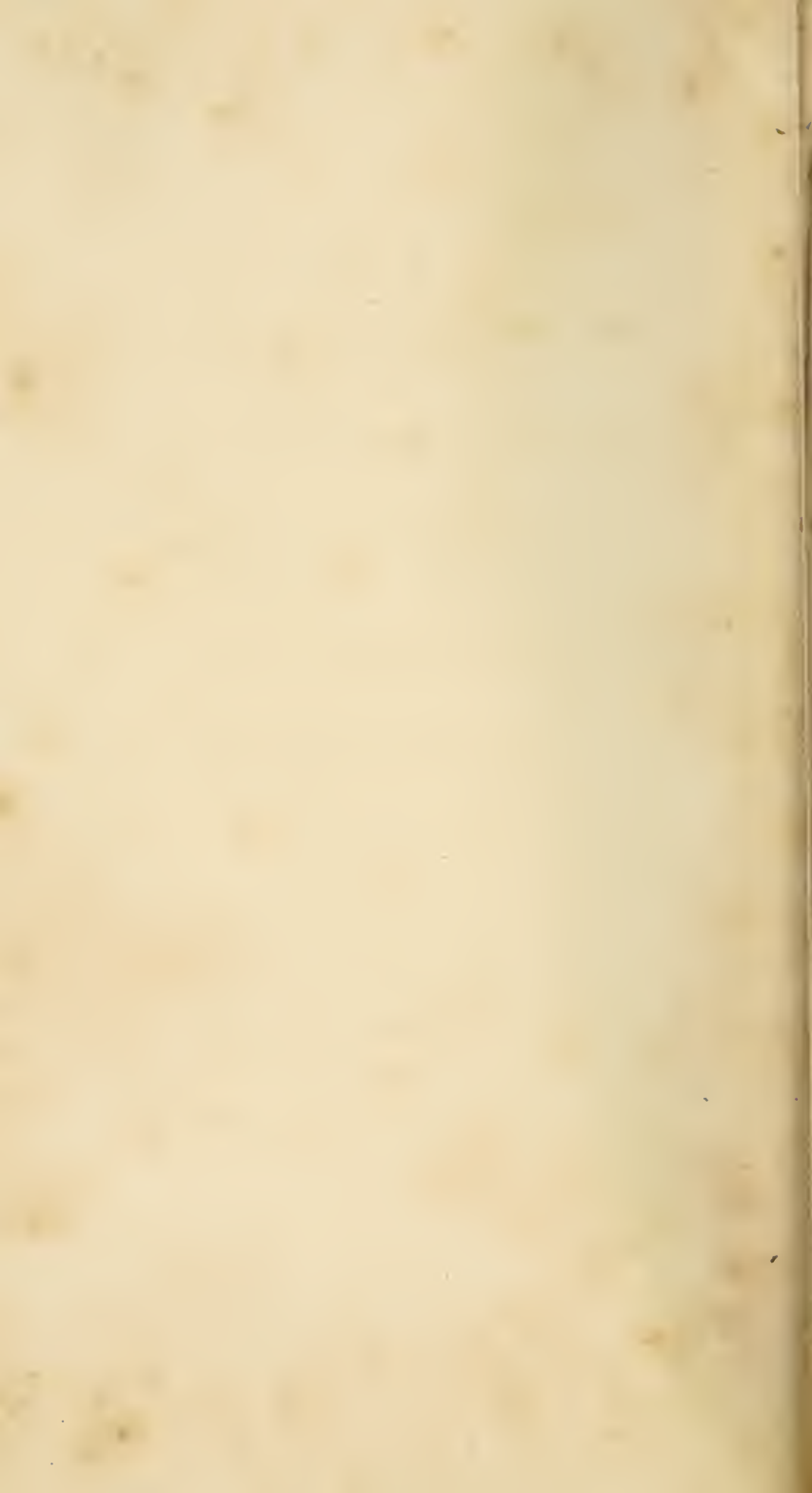
SECOND EDITION.

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TO

THE REV. RICHARD VALPY, D.D.,

THIS ATTEMPT AT DRAMATIC COMPOSITION,

AS A SLENDER TOKEN OF GRATITUDE,

FOR BENEFITS WHICH CANNOT BE EXPRESSED IN WORDS,

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY

HIS AFFECTIONATE PUPIL,

T. N. TALFOURD.



P R E F A C E

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

“I left no calling for this idle trade,
No duty broke.” POPE.

THE title of this Drama is borrowed from the Tragedy of Euripides, which gave the first hint of the situation in which its hero is introduced—that of a foundling youth educated in a temple, and assisting in its services; but otherwise there is no resemblance between this imperfect sketch and that exquisite picture. It has been written,—not indeed without a view to an ideal stage, which should never be absent from the mind of the humblest aspirant to dramatic composition, but without any hope of rendering it worthy to be acted. If it were regarded as a drama composed for actual representation, I am well aware that not in “matter of form” only, but in “matter of substance,” it would be found wanting. The idea of the principal character,—that of a nature essentially pure and disinterested, deriving its strength entirely from goodness and

thought, not overcoming evil by the force of will, but escaping it by an insensibility to its approach,—vividly conscious of existence and its pleasures, yet willing to lay them down at the call of duty,—is scarcely capable of being rendered sufficiently striking in itself, or of being subjected to such agitations, as tragedy requires in its heroes. It was farther necessary, in order to involve such a character in circumstances which might excite terror, or grief, or joy, to introduce other machinery than that of passions working naturally within, or events arising from ordinary and probable motives without; as its own elements would not supply the contests of tragic emotion, nor would its sufferings, however accumulated, present a varied or impressive picture. Recourse has therefore been had, not only to the old Grecian notion of Destiny, apart from all moral agencies, and to a prophecy indicating its purport in reference to the individuals involved in its chain, but to the idea of *fascination*, as an engine by which Fate may work its purposes on the innocent mind, and force it into terrible action, most uncongenial to itself, but necessary to the issue. Either perhaps of these aids might have been permitted, if used in accordance with the entire spirit of the piece; but the employment of *both* could not be justified in a drama intended for visual presentation, in which a certain verisimilitude is essential to the faith of the spectator. Whether any groups, surrounded with the associations of the Greek mythology, and subjected to the capricious laws of Greek superstition, could be endowed by

genius itself with such present life as to awaken the sympathies of an English audience, may well be doubted; but it cannot be questioned that except by sustaining a stern unity of purpose, and breathing an atmosphere of Grecian sentiment over the whole, so as to render the picture national and coherent in all its traits, the effect must be unsatisfactory and unreal. Conscious of my inability to produce a work thus justified to the imagination by its own completeness and power, I have not attempted it; but have sought, out of mere weakness, for "Fate and metaphysical aid" to "crown withal" the ordinary persons of a romantic play. I have, therefore, asked far too much for a spectator to grant; but the case is different with the reader, who does not seek the powerful excitements of the theatre, nor is bound to a continuous attention; and who, for the sake of scattered sentiments or expressions which may please him, may, at least by a latitude of friendly allowance, forgive the incongruities of the machinery by which the story is conducted. This drama may be described as the phantasm of a tragedy,—not a thing of substance mortised into the living rock of humanity,—and therefore incapable of exciting that interest which grows out of human feeling, or of holding that permanent place in the memory, which truth only can retain.

As this attempt at dramatic composition is not submitted to the public, but intended only for the perusal of friends, it may not be deemed an intrusion on their indulgence, if I state, on my own behalf, the circumstances under which it was written,

and the motives which induce me, at this time, to seek for it that partial circulation to which alone it is fitted.

There are few perhaps among those who have written for the press, predominant as that majority now is over the minority of mere readers, who have not, at some season of their lives, contemplated the achievement of a tragedy. The narrow and well-defined limits by which the action of tragedy is circumscribed—the various affections which may live, and wrestle, and suffer within these palpable boundaries—its appeal to the sources of grief common to humanity on the one hand, and to the most majestic shapings of the imagination on the other, softening and subduing the heart to raise and to ennoble it,—and perhaps, more than all, the vivid presentment of the forms in which the strengths and weaknesses of our nature are embodied, its calamities dignified, and its high destiny vindicated, even in the mortal struggle by which for a season it is vanquished,—may well impress every mind, reaching, however feebly, towards the creative, with a fond desire to imitate the great masters of its “so potent art.” This desire has a powerful ally in the exuberant spirits of youth, when the mind, unchilled by the sad realities of life, searches out for novelty in those forms of sorrow, from which it afterwards may turn for relief to the flickerings of mirth, and to brief snatches of social pleasure. Perhaps “gorgeous Tragedy” left a deeper impression when she passed “sweeping by” my intellectual vision, than would have been otherwise received by a mind

unapt for so high a correspondence, by reason of the accident that the glimpse was stolen. Denied by the conscientious scruples of friends an early acquaintance with plays, I had derived from Mrs. More's Sacred Dramas my first sense of that peculiar enjoyment which the idea of dramatic action, however imperfectly conveyed, gives; and stiff and cumbrous as they now seem, I owe to their author that debt of gratitude which many perhaps share with me, who have first looked on the world of literature through the net-work of most sincere, but exclusive opinions. These gave, however, but dim hints of the greatness which was behind;—I looked into the domain of tragedy as into a mountain region covered with mist and cloud;—and incapable of appreciating the deep humanities of Shakspeare, “rested and expatiated” in the brocaded grandeurs of Dryden, Rowe, and Addison. To describe the delight with which, for the first time, I saw the curtain of Covent Garden Theatre raised for the representation of *Cato*, would be idle,—or how it was sustained during the noble performance which followed, when the vision of Roman constancy and classic grace which had haunted the mind through all its schoolboy years (then drawing to a close) seemed bodied forth in palpable form,—when the poor common-places of an artificial diction flowed “mended from the tongue” of the actor, and the thoughtful words trembling on his lips suggested at once the feeling of earthly weakness and of immortal hope,—and when the old Stoic, in his rigid grandeur, was re-

conciled to the human heart by the struggle of paternal love, and became "passion'd as ourselves," without losing any portion of that statue-like dignity which made him the representative of a world of heroic dreamings.

After this glimpse of the acted drama, I was long haunted by the idle wish to write a tragedy, and many hours did I happily, but vainly spend in sober contemplations of its theme. I tried to wreathe several romantic and impossible stories, which I fashioned in my evening walks into acts, and began to write a scene; but however pleased I might be with the outline of these fantasies, I was too much disgusted with the alternate baldness and fustian of the blank verse which I produced in the attempt to execute them, to proceed. At this time also, just as the laborious avocations of my life were commencing, my taste and feeling, as applied to poetry, underwent an entire change, consequent on my becoming acquainted with the poetry of WORDSWORTH. That power which, slighted and scoffed at as it was then, has since exerted a purifying influence on the literature of this country, such as no other individual power has ever wrought; which has not only given to the material universe "a speech and a language" before unheard, but has opened new sources of enjoyment even in the works of the greatest poets of past days, and imparted a new sense by which we may relish them;—which, while on the one hand it has dissipated the sickly fascinations of gaudy phraseology, has, on the other, cast around the lowliest conditions a

new and exquisite light, and traced out the links of good by which all human things are bound together, and clothed our earthly life in the solemnities which belong to its origin and its destiny—humbled the pride of my swelling conceits, and taught me to look on the mighty works of genius, not with the presumption of an imitator, but with the veneration of a child. For the early enjoyment of this great blessing, which the sneers of popular critics might otherwise have withheld from me for years, I am indebted to my friend Mr. **BARON FIELD**, now filling a judicial situation at Gibraltar, who overcame my reluctance to peruse what the *Edinburgh Review* had so triumphantly derided. The love of contemplative poetry thus inspired, led me, in such leisure as I could attain, rather to ponder over the sources of the profoundest emotions, or to regard them as associated with the majestic forms of the universe, than to follow them into their violent conflicts and mournful catastrophes; and although I never ceased to regard the acted drama as the most delightful of recreations, I sought no longer to work out a frigid imitation of writers, whom alone I could hope to copy, and whose enchantments were dissipated by more genial magic.

But the tragic drama was about to revive among us, and I was not insensible to its progress. Although the tragedies of the last twelve years are not worthy to be compared with the noblest productions of the great age of our drama, they are, with two or three exceptions, far superior to any which had

been written in the interval. Since the last skirts of the glory of Shakspeare's age disappeared, we shall search in vain for serious plays of equal power and beauty with *Virginus*, *William Tell*, *Mirandola*, *Rienzi*, or the *Merchant of London*,—at least if we except *Venice Preserved* for the admirable conduct of its story, and *Douglas* for that romantic tenderness and pathos which have been too little appreciated of late years. It happened to me to be intimately acquainted with all those who contributed to this impulse; and to take an immediate interest in their successes. I also enjoyed the friendship of the delightful artist to whom all have by turns been indebted for the realization of their noblest conceptions, and was enabled to enjoy with more exquisite relish the home-born affection with which these were endued, and the poetical grace breathed around them, by finding the same influences shed by Mr. MACREADY over the sphere of his social and domestic life. It will not be surprising that, to one thus associated, the old wish to accomplish something in dramatic shape should recur, not accompanied by the hope of sharing in the scenic triumphs of his friends, but bounded by the possibility of conducting a tale through dialogue to a close, and of making it subserve to the expression of some cherished thoughts. In this state of feeling, some years ago, the scheme of the drama of Ion presented itself to me; and, after brooding over it for some time, I wrote a prose outline of its successive scenes nearly in the order and to the effect in which they are now

completed, and made some progress in an opening scene of which little now remains. The attempt was soon laid aside; for I found the composition of dramatic blank verse even more difficult now that I had present to me the ease and vividness of my friends, than when I had been contented to emulate the ponderous lines of the dramatists of Garrick's age. Still the idea of my hero recurred to me often: I found my pleasantest thoughts gathering about him; and rather more than two years ago I determined to make one essay more. Since that time such seasons of leisure as I could find have been devoted to the work: but I had so great distrust of my ability to complete it, that I did not mention my design to any one; and I cannot charge myself with having permitted it to interfere with any professional or private duty. It has been chiefly written in scraps of time; composed for the most part on journeys, and afterwards committed to paper; and thus, at the close of last year, I found four acts reduced into form. At this time, the sudden realisation of another youthful dream opened to me the prospect of additional duties, which I knew full well ought to preclude the continuance of those secret flirtations with the Muse in which I had indulged; and, therefore, I resolved to make a last effort, and, by completing my drama before those duties should commence, to free myself from the bondage of those threads of fantastical interest which had woven themselves about my mind. I accordingly wrote the fifth act with far more rapidity than any of the previous

passages of my play ; and, before I was called upon to share in more momentous business, I had communicated to a few friends the result of my scribblings, and bade adieu to my dramatic endeavours and hopes.

But it may well be asked, why, with the sense I have of the feebleness of this poetical sketch, I have ventured to intrude it on my friends? My chief reason is, that I am anxious to cast from my own mind the associations which have hung about it during the composition of the piece, and which, while it remained in manuscript susceptible of alteration, I could not entirely hope for ; and, farther, to preclude the charge (if it should ever be brought to light hereafter) that it had occupied leisure which henceforward must be devoted to other studies. I have also a desire to gratify myself by presenting it to my friends, especially to those who are removed to a distance ; because, although *as a drama* it is unworthy the attention of the world, yet, as containing thoughts which have passed through my own mind, it may be acceptable to those whose conversation I can no longer enjoy. It would be a sufficient reason to myself for printing it, that I shall be able thus to remind SIR EDWARD RYAN, now most honourably to himself and happily for India, Chief Justice of Bengal, and his excellent colleague SIR BENJAMIN MALKIN, of the delightful hours we have spent together on the Oxford circuit, when life was younger with us, and when some of the topics they will find just touched on in these verses, were the themes of our graver

walks between Ross and Monmouth, or in the deep winding valleys indenting the Table-Land above Church-Stretton, or haply by moonlight in the church-yard of Ross. I take leave to mention these as far away; but there are others of my fellow-labourers at home, whose sympathy and whose conversation have cheered my professional life, who I believe will receive it cordially; and among them I hope my sometime Sessions leader, who has committed a similar offence, though with more extenuating circumstances, by investing with so much dignity of passion and richness of language the story of the *Countess of Essex*, will not disdain it.

There is yet one other motive which I have in commending this work to the classical press of my friend Mr. JOHN VALPY,—that I may have the honour of inscribing it to my revered master and friend, his father. It is not the first imperfect exercise in English verse to which he has shown favour, but it will be the last. Long as I trust he will yet be spared to the large circle through which the genial influences of his life have been diffused, I shall never again thus intrude upon a kindness which nothing can weary.

T. N. T.

London, April 15, 1835.

P R E F A C E

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

HAVING exhausted the small impression which was originally printed of *ION*, and finding that there are yet friends in whose hands I wish to place it, without copies, I send it again to the Press. I have availed myself of this opportunity to correct some verbal inaccuracies; to expunge a few superfluous lines; and to introduce considerable alterations in the first scene between *Adrastus* and *Ion* in the Fourth Act;—in the scene between *Phocion* and *Ctesiphon* in the same Act;—and the two last scenes of the Fifth Act. As one purpose for which I ventured to seek for it this limited circulation, was to communicate to my friends, and especially to those from whose intercourse the changes of the world has severed me, the expression of feelings in which they share; I have now added to it a few sonnets, still more directly personal. These,

with the exception of the two last, embody feelings long ago awakened, and dearly cherished, in association with the scenes which have recently been depicted with so genial and so graphic a power, by Miss Mitford, in her ‘Belford Regis.’ They were composed at the period to which they refer,—the summer of 1826,—when I was honoured by Mr. Fyshe Palmer, and his supporters, with the professional charge of their interests; and were (with the exception of the third,) inserted in the *Reading Mercury* after the termination of the struggle. The excitements of that season revived other feelings than those of partisanship; quickened elder recollections into fresh life; deepened the sense of gratitude to my fellow-townsmen for the generous encouragement with which they fostered my first endeavours; and produced these “frail memorials” of a sympathy expanding beyond the limit of political associations, which may perhaps be reviewed now with some additional interest by those who may see in all that is prosperous in the life of the author the reflections of their own unwearied kindnesses.

In reprinting my Drama, I cannot refrain from expressing my sense of the indulgence which it has already received from many, whose regard I prize as among the greatest of earthly blessings. To the author of the article in the *Quarterly Review* for July, on ‘The last Essays of Elia,’—(which even satisfied those to whom the delightful subject of the principal criticism was intimately known in his life-time)

for his delicate allusion to my poem ; and to the distinguished Editor of that Journal, for the extended notice which appeared in its last number, my especial thanks are due. If that review had appeared in the ordinary course of critical examination, as applied to a published work, I should think it unfit to offer thanks for what I might regard with pride, as an unbiassed, though liberal judgment ; but, under the circumstances in which it was written, I esteem it rather as a generous incitement, offered from a very high quarter to one, who, in the midst of uncongenial studies, had sought to embody some vision of the good and pure, and who distrusted his power of execution too much to submit the product to the world. It is probable, that thus emboldened, I shall publish it hereafter ; but, in that event, I shall withdraw the prefaces and the sonnets, as too personal for other than friendly eyes : so that my desire to present the play with these accompaniments to some who will not think them impertinent, forms a sufficient reason for confining the present impression to a limited circle.

It remains for me to notice the friendly expostulation of the author of the note in the *Quarterly Review* for July, to which I have already referred, on the resolution which I expressed in my former preface to write no more. I should be sorry, indeed, to be thought, especially by such a writer, indifferent to literature, because I feel compelled to relinquish the ambition of adding to its stores. I am rather amenable

to the charge of having loved it "not wisely, but too well." It is because I feel its pleasures too intensely,—because the serene beauty of its untroubled light shines upon me through the interstices of my ordinary labours with too fascinating a power, that I think it my duty to those who have committed to me a public trust, and those who depend on my professional exertions, to refrain from seeking to involve myself in another dramatic spell. I rejoice, indeed, to trace in that form of poetry, which I have chiefly loved, an analogy to the greater occasions, and the nobler excitements of my own profession. Like a tragedy, a momentous trial embraces within a few hours an important action,—condenses human interests, and hopes, and passions within its anxious circle,—is restrained, bounded, and dignified by solemnities and forms, which define it, as a thing apart from the common succession of human affairs,—developes, sometimes, affecting traits of generosity, or is graced by the beauty of suffering,—and is terminated by a catastrophe anticipated with quivering expectation, which may decide character, fortune, or life itself,—with sometimes a background of public interest, where the struggle of principles, and the fate of parties, may be seen in the intellectual perspective. But this is accident, rather than art; the absolute and painful reality precludes the air of repose which the poet can breathe over his loftiest creations; and although there is analogy sufficient to excuse a lawyer, if he should occasionally indulge in glimpses at the master-pieces of tragic power, "which

may make him less forlorn ;” he cannot justify an attempt to copy them. In printing *ION*, I have fully accomplished my wish to tear myself from its subject. Like Hamlet, I feel that “ these words are not mine now :” I have confessed, and am absolved. Yet I would fain hope that I do not bid such studies a final adieu. If I shall be able, in the evening of life, to feel that its labours are closed, I shall delight to recur to them, unblamed. But it is presumptuous to anticipate a happiness so distant and so uncertain ; and if I am precluded from again enjoying the pleasure of a dramatic attempt, I shall still have abundant reason to be grateful.

T. N. T.

London, October, 1835.

I O N;

A T R A G E D Y.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ADRASTUS, King of Argos.

MEDON, High Priest of the Temple of Apollo at Argos.

CRYTHES, Captain of the Royal Guard.

PHOCION, son of Medon.

CTESIPHON, }
CASSANDER, } noble Argive youths.

ION, a foundling youth protected by Medon.

AGENOR, }
CLEON, } sages of Argos.
TIMOCLES, }

IRUS, a boy, slave of Agenor.

CLEMANTHE, Medon's daughter.

ABRA, attendant on Clemanthe.

SCENE.—Argos.

THE TIME of the Action is comprised in one day and night,
and the following morning.

ACT THE FIRST.

I O N ;

A T R A G E D Y.

A C T I.

SCENE I.

The Interior of the Temple of Apollo, which is supposed to be placed on a rocky eminence. Early morning. The interior lighted by a single lamp suspended from the roof. AGENOR resting against a column;—IRUS seated on a bench at the side of the scene.

AGENOR comes forward and speaks.

AGENOR.

WILL the dawn never visit us? These hours
Toil heavy with the unresting curse they bear

To do the work of desolating years !
All distant sounds are hush'd ;—the shriek of death
And the survivors' wail are now unheard,
As grief had worn itself to patience. Irus !
I'm loth so soon to break thy scanty rest,
But my heart sickens for the tardy morn ;
Sure it is breaking ;—speed and look—yet hold,
Know'st thou the fearful shelf of rock that hangs
Above the encroaching waves, the loftiest point
That stretches eastward ?

IRUS.

Know it? Yes, my Lord ;
There often have I bless'd the opening day,
Which thy free kindness gave me leave to waste
In happy wandering through the forests.

AGENOR.

Well,
Thou art not then afraid to tread it ; there
The earliest streak from the unrisen sun

Is to be welcomed ;—tell me how it gleams,
In bloody portent or in saffron hope,
And hasten back to slumber.

IRUS.

I shall hasten :
Believe not that thy summons broke my rest ;
I was not sleeping: [Exit IRUS.

AGENOR.

Heaven be with thee, child !
His grateful mention of delights bestow'd
On that most piteous state of servile childhood
By liberal words chance-dropp'd, hath touch'd a vein
Of feeling which I deem'd for ever numb'd,
And, by a gush of household memories, breaks
The icy casing of that thick despair
Which day by day hath gather'd o'er my heart ;
While, basely safe, within this column'd circle,
Uplifted far into the purer air
And by Apollo's partial love secured,

I have, in spirit, glided with the Plague
As in foul darkness or in sickliest light
It wafted death through Argos ; and mine ears,
Listening athirst for any human sound,
Have caught the dismal cry of confused pain,
Which to this dizzy height the fitful wind
Hath borne from each sad quarter of the vale
Where life was.

Re-enter IRUS.

Are there signs of day-break ?

IRUS.

None ;

The eastern sky is still unbroken gloom.

AGENOR.

It cannot surely be. Thine eyes are dim
(No fault of thine) for want of rest, or now
I look upon them near, with scalding tears.
Has care alighted on a head so young !

What grief hast thou been weeping?

IRUS.

Pardon me ;

I never thought at such a mournful time
To plead my humble sorrow in excuse
Of poorly-render'd service : but my brother—
Thou mayst have noted him,—a sturdy lad,
With eye so merry and with foot so light
That none could chide his gamesomeness—fell sick
But yesterday, and died in my weak arms
Ere I could seek for stouter aid ; I hoped
That I had taught my grief to veil its signs
From thy observant care ; but when I stood
Upon the well-known terrace where we loved,
Arm link'd in arm, to watch the gleaming sails—
His favourite pastime, for he burn'd to share
A seaman's hardy lot,—my tears would flow,
And I forgot to dry them. But I see
Cleon is walking yonder ; let me call him ;
For sure 'twill cheer thy heart to speak with him.

AGENOR.

Call him, good youth, and then go in to sleep,

Or, if thou wilt, to weep.

[*Exit IRUS.*]

I envy thee

The privilege, but Jupiter forbend

'That I should rob thee of it!

Enter CLEON.

CLEON.

Hail, Agenor!

Dark as our lot remains, 'tis comfort yet

To find thy age unstricken.

AGENOR.

Rather mourn

That I am destined still to linger here

In strange unnatural strength, while death is round me.

I chide these sinews that are framed so tough

Grief cannot palsy them; I chide the air

Which round this citadel of nature breathes
With sweetness not of this world ; I would share
The common grave of my dear countrymen,
And sink to rest while all familiar things
Old custom has endear'd are failing with me,
Rather than shiver on in life behind them :
Nor should these walls detain me from the paths
Where death may be embraced, but that my word,
In a rash moment plighted to our host,
Forbids me to depart without his license,
Which firmly he refuses.

CLEON.

Grant me pardon

If I rejoice to find the generous Priest
Means, with Apollo's blessing, to preserve
The treasure of thy wisdom ;—nay, he trusts not
To promises alone ; his gates are barr'd
Against thy egress :—none, indeed, may pass them
Save the youth Ion, to whose earnest prayer
His foster-father grants reluctant leave

To visit the sad city at his will :
And freely does he use the dangerous boon,
Which, in my thought, the love that cherish'd him,
Since he was found within the sacred grove
Smiling amidst the storm, a most rare infant,
Should have had sternness to deny.

AGENOR.

What, Ion

The only inmate of this fane allowed
To seek the mournful walks where death is busy !—
Ion our sometime darling, whom we prized
As a stray gift, by bounteous Heaven dismiss'd
From some bright sphere which sorrow may not cloud
To make the happy happier ! Is *he* sent
To grapple with the miseries of this time,
Whose nature such ethereal aspect wears
As it would perish at the touch of wrong ?
By no internal contest is he train'd
For such hard duty ; no emotions rude
Hath his clear spirit vanquish'd ;—Love, the germ

Of his mild nature, hath spread graces forth,
Expanding with its progress, as the store
Of rainbow colour which the seed conceals
Sheds out its tints from its dim treasury,
To flush and circle in the flower. No tear
Hath fill'd his eye save that of thoughtful joy
When, in the evening stillness, lovely things
Press'd on his soul too busily ; his voice,
If, in the earnestness of childish sports,
Raised to the tone of anger, check'd its force,
As if it fear'd to break its being's law,
And falter'd into music ; when the forms
Of guilty passion have been made to live
In pictured speech, and others have wax'd loud
In righteous indignation, he hath heard
With sceptic smile, or from some slender vein
Of goodness, which surrounding gloom conceal'd,
Struck sunlight o'er it : so his life hath flow'd
From its mysterious urn a sacred stream,
In whose calm depth the beautiful and pure
Alone are mirror'd ; which, though shapes of ill

May hover round its surface, glides in light,
And takes no shadow from them.

CLEON.

Yet, methinks,
Thou hast not lately met him, or a change
Pass'd strangely on him had not miss'd thy wonder.
His form appears dilated ; in these eyes,
Where pleasure danced, a thoughtful sadness dwells ;
Stern purpose knits the forehead, which till now
Knew not the passing wrinkle of a care :
Those limbs which in their heedless motion own'd
A stripling's playful happiness, are strung
As if the iron hardships of the camp
Had given them sturdy nurture ; and his step,
Its airiness of yesterday forgotten,
Awakes the echoes of these desolate courts,
As if a warrior of heroic mould
Paced them in armour.

AGENOR.

Hope is in thy tale.

'This is no freak of Nature's wayward course,
But work of pitying Heaven; for not in vain
The gods have pour'd into that guileless heart
The strengths that nerve the hero;—they are ours.

CLEON.

How can he aid us? Can he stay the pulse
Of ebbing life,—arrest the infected winds,
Or smite the hungry spectre of the grave?

AGENOR.

And dost thou think these breezes are our foes,—
The innocent airs that used to dance around us,
As if they felt the blessings they convey'd,
Or that the death they bear is casual? No!
'Tis human guilt that blackens in the cloud,
Flashes athwart its mass in jagged fire,
Whirls in the hurricane, pollutes the air,

Turns all the joyous melodies of earth
To murmurings of doom. There is a foe
Who in the glorious summit of the state
Draws down the great resentment of the gods,
Whom he defies to strike us ;—yet his power
Partakes that just infirmity which Nature
Blends in the empire of her proudest sons—
That it is cased within a single breast,
And may be pluck'd thence by a single arm.
Let but that arm, selected by the gods,
Do its great office on the tyrant's life,
And Argos breathes again !

CLEON.

A footstep !—hush !

Thy wishes, falling on a slavish ear,
Would tempt another outrage : 'tis a friend—
An honest though a crabbed one—Timocles :
Something hath ruffled him.—Good day, Timocles !

[TIMOCLES *passes in front.*

He will not speak to us.

AGENOR.

But he *shall* speak.

Timocles—nay then, thus I must enforce thee ;

[staying him.]

Sure thou wilt not refuse a comrade's hand

That may be cold ere sunset.

TIMOCLES. *[giving his hand.]*

Thou mayst school me ;

Thy years and love have license : but I own not

A stripling's mastery ; is 't fit, Agenor ?

AGENOR.

Nay, thou must tell thy wrong : whate'er it prove,

I hail thy anger as a hopeful sign,

For it revives the thought of household days,

When the small bickerings of friends had space

To fret, and Death was not for ever nigh

To frown upon estrangement. What has moved thee ?

TIMOCLES.

I blush to tell it. Weary of the night
And of my life, I sought the western portal :
It opened, when ascending from the stair
That through the rock winds spiral from the town,
Ion, the foundling cherish'd by the Priest,
Stood in the entrance : with such mild command
As he has often smilingly obey'd,
I bade him stand aside and let me pass ;
When—wouldst thou think it?—in determined speech
He gave me counsel to return : I press'd
Impatient onward : he, with honied phrase
His daring act excusing, grasp'd my arm
With strength resistless ; led me from the gate ;
Replaced its ponderous bars ; and, with a look
As modest as he wore in childhood, left me.

AGENOR.

And thou wilt thank him for it soon ; he comes—
Now hold thy angry purpose if thou canst !

Enter ION.

ION.

I seek thee, good Timocles, to implore
Again thy pardon. I am young in trust,
And fear lest, in the earnestness of love,
I stayed thy course too rudely. Thou hast borne
My childish folly often,—do not frown
If I have ventured with unmanner'd zeal
To guard the ripe experiences of years
From one rash moment's danger.

TIMOCLES.

Leave thy care.

If I am weary of the flutterer life,
Is mortal bidding thus to cage it in?

ION.

And art thou tired of being? Has the grave
No terrors for thee? Hast thou sunder'd quite

Those thousand meshes which old custom weaves
To bind us earthward, and gay fancy films
With airy lustre various? Hast subdued
Those cleavings of the spirit to its prison,
Those nice regards, dear habits, pensive memories,
That change the valour of the thoughtful breast
To brave dissimulation of its fears?
Is Hope quench'd in thy bosom? Thou art free,
And in the simple dignity of man
Standest apart untempted:—do not lose
The great occasion thou hast pluck'd from misery,
Nor play the spendthrift with a great despair,
But use it nobly!

TIMOCLES.

What, to strike? to slay?

ION.

No!—not unless the audible voice of Heaven
Call thee to that dire office; but to shed

On ears abused by falsehood, truths of power
In words immortal,—not such words as flash
From the fierce demagogue's unthinking rage
To madden for a moment and expire,—
Nor such as the rapt orator imbues
With warmth of facile sympathy, and moulds
To mirrors radiant with fair images,
To grace the noble fervour of an hour ;—
But words which bear the spirit of great deeds
Wing'd for the future ; which the dying breath
Of Freedom's martyr shapes as it exhales,
And to the most enduring forms of earth
Commits—to linger in the craggy shade
Of the huge valley, 'neath the eagle's home,
Or in the sea-cave where the tempest sleeps,
Till some heroic leader bid them wake
To thrill the world with echoes !—But I talk
Of things above my grasp, which strangely press
Upon my soul, and tempt me to forget
The duties of my youth ;—pray you forgive me.

TIMOCLES.

Have I not said so?

AGENOR.

Welcome to the morn!

The eastern gates unfold, the Priest approaches;

[*As AGENOR speaks, the great gates at the back of the scene open; the sea is discovered far beneath,—the dawn breaking over it; MEDON, the Priest, enters attended.*]

And lo! the sun is struggling with the gloom,

Whose masses fill the eastern sky, and tints

Its edges with dull red;—but he *will* triumph;

Bless'd be the omen!

MEDON.

God of light and joy,

Once more delight us with thy healing beams!

If I may trace thy language in the clouds

That wait upon thy rising, help is nigh—

But help achieved in blood.

ION.

Sayst thou in blood?

MEDON.

Yes, Ion!—why, he sickens at the word,
Spite of his new-born strength;—the sighs of woe
That he will seek have shed their paleness on him.
Has this night's walk shown more than common sorrow?

ION.

I pass'd the palace where the frantic king
Yet holds his crimson revel, whence the roar
Of desperate mirth came, mingling with the sigh
Of death-subdued robustness, and the gleam
Of festal lamps mid spectral columns hung
Flaunting o'er shapes of anguish made them ghastlier.
How can I cease to tremble for the sad ones
He mocks—and him the wretchedest of all?

TIMOCLES.

And canst thou pity him? Dost thou discern,
Amidst his impious darings, plea for him?

ION.

Is he not childless, friendless, and a king?
He's human; and some pulse of good must live
Within his nature—have ye tried to wake it?

MEDON.

Yes; I believe he felt our sufferings once;
When, at my strong entreaty, he dispatch'd
Phocion my son to Delphos, there to seek
Our cause of sorrow; but, as time dragg'd on
Without his messenger's return, he grew
Impatient of all counsel,—to his palace
In awful mood retiring, wildly call'd
The reckless of his court to share his stores
And end all with him. When we dared disturb
His dreadful feastings with a humble prayer

That he would meet us, the poor slave, who bore
The message, flew back smarting from the scourge,
And mutter'd a decree that he who next
Unbidden met the tyrant's glance should die.

AGENOR.

I am prepared to brave it.

CLEON.

So am I.

TIMOCLES.

And I—

ION.

O do not think my prayer
Bespeaks unseemly forwardness—send me !
The coarsest reed that trembles in the marsh,
If Heaven select it for its instrument,
May shed celestial music on the breeze
As clearly as the pipe whose virgin gold

Befits the lip of Phœbus ;—ye are wise,
And needed by your country ; ye are fathers :
I am a lone stray thing, whose little life
By strangers' bounty cherish'd, like a wave
That from the summer sea a wanton breeze
Lifts for a moment's sparkle, will subside
Light as it rose, nor leave a sigh in breaking.

MEDON.

Ion, no sigh !

ION.

Forgive me if I seem'd
To doubt that thou wilt mourn me if I fall ;
Nor would I tax thy love with such a fear
But that high promptings, which could never rise
Spontaneous in my nature, bid me plead
Thus boldly for the mission.

MEDON.

My brave boy !

It shall be as thou wilt. I see thou art call'd
To this great peril, and I will not stay thee.
When wilt thou be prepared to seek it?

ION.

Now.

Only before I go, thus, on my knee,
Let me in one word thank thee for a life
Made by thy love a cloudless holiday;
And O, my more than father! let me look
Up to thy face as if indeed a father's,
And give me a son's blessing.

MEDON.

Bless thee, son!

I should be marble now; let's part at once.

ION.

If I should not return, bless Phocion from me;
And, for Clemanthe—may I speak one word,
One parting word with my fair playfellow?

MEDON.

If thou wouldst have it so, thou shalt.

ION.

Farewell then !

Your prayers wait on my steps. The arm of Heaven

I feel in life or death will be around me. [*Exit.*

MEDON.

O grant it be in life! Let's to the sacrifice.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

*An apartment of the Temple. Enter CLEMANTHE
followed by ABRA.*

CLEMANTHE.

Is he so changed?

ABRA.

His bearing is so alter'd
That, distant, I scarce knew him for himself;
But, looking in his face, I felt his smile
Gracious as ever, though its sweetness wore
Unwonted sorrow in it.

CLEMANTHE.

He will go
To some high fortune, and forget us all,
Reclaim'd (be sure of it) by noble parents;

Me he forgets already ; for five days,
Five melancholy days, I have not seen him.

ABRA.

Thou knowest that he has privilege to range
The infected city ; and, 'tis said, he spends
The hours of needful rest in squalid hovels
Where death is most forsaken.

CLEMANTHE.

Why is this ?

Why should my father, niggard of the lives
Of aged men, be prodigal of youth
So rich in glorious prophecy as his ?

ABRA.

He comes to answer for himself. I'll leave you. [*Exit.*

CLEMANTHE.

Stay ! Well my heart may guard its secret best
By its own strength.

Enter ION.

ION.

How fares my pensive sister?

CLEMANTHE.

How should I fare but ill when the pale hand
Draws the black foldings of the eternal curtain
Closer and closer round us—Phocion absent—
And thou, forsaking all within thy home,
Wilt risk thy life with strangers, in whose aid
Even thou canst do but little?

ION.

It is little:

But in these sharp extremities of fortune,
The blessings which the weak and poor can scatter
Have their own season. 'Tis a little thing
To give a cup of water; yet its draught
Of cool refreshment drain'd by fever'd lips,

May give a shock of pleasure to the frame
More exquisite than when nectarean juice
Renews the life of joy in happiest hours.
It is a little thing to speak a phrase
Of common comfort which by daily use
Has almost lost its sense ; yet on the ear
Of him who thought to die unmourn'd 'twill fall
Like choicest music ; fill the glazing eye
With gentle tears ; relax the knotted hand
To know the bonds of fellowship again ;
And shed on the departing soul a sense
More precious than the benison of friends
About the honor'd deathbed of the rich,
To him who else were lonely, that another
Of the great family is near and feels.

CLEMAN'THE.

O thou canst never bear these mournful offices !
So blithe, so merry once ! Will not the sight
Of frenzied agonies unfix thy reason,
Or the dumb woe congeal thee ?

ION.

No, Clemanthe ;

They are the patient sorrows that touch nearest !
If thou hadst seen the warrior while he writhed
In the last grapple of his sinewy frame
With conquering anguish, strive to cast a smile
(And not in vain) upon his fragile wife,
Waning beside him,—and, his limbs composed,
The widow of the moment fix her gaze
Of longing, speechless love, upon the babe,
The only living thing which yet was hers,
Spreading its arms for its own resting-place,
Yet with attenuated hand wave off
The unstricken child, and so embraceless die,
Stifling the mighty hunger of the heart ;
Thou couldst endure the sight of selfish grief
In sullenness or frenzy ;—but to-day
Another lot falls on me.

CLEMANTHE.

Thou wilt leave us !

I read it plainly in thy alter'd mien ;—

Is it for ever ?

ION.

That is with the gods.

I go but to the palace, urged by hope,

Which from afar hath darted on my soul,

That to the humbleness of one like me

The haughty king may listen.

CLEMANTHE.

To the palace !

Knowest thou the peril—nay the certain issue

That waits thee ? Death !—The tyrant has decreed it,

Confirmed it with an oath ; and he has power

To keep that oath ; for, hated as he is,

The reckless soldiers who partake his riot

Are swift to do his bidding.

ION.

I know all;

But they who call me to the work can shield me,
Or make me strong to suffer.

CLEMANTHE.

Then the sword
Falls on thy neck! O Gods! to think that thou,
Who in the plenitude of youthful life
Art now before me, ere the sun decline,
Perhaps in one short hour shalt lie cold, cold,
To speak, smile, bless no more!—Thou shalt not go!

ION.

Thou must not stay me, fair one; even thy father,
Who (blessings on him!) loves me as his son,
Yields to the will of Heaven.

CLEMANTHE.

And he can do this!

C

I shall not bear his presence if thou fallest
By his consent ; so shall I be alone.

ION.

Phocion will soon return, and juster thoughts
Of thy admiring father close the gap
Thy old companion left behind him.

CLEMANTIE.

Never!

What will to me be father, brother, friends,
When thou art gone—the light of our life quench'd—
Haunting like spectres of departed joy
The home where thou wert dearest ?

ION.

Thrill me not

With words that, in their agony, suggest
A hope too ravishing,—or my head will swim,
And my heart faint within me.

CLEMANTHE.

Has my speech
Such blessed power? I will not mourn it then,
Though it hath told a secret I had borne
Till death in silence;—how affection grew
To this, I know not;—day succeeded day,
Each fraught with the same innocent delights,
Without one shock to ruffle the disguise
Of sisterly regard which veil'd it well,
Till thy changed mien reveal'd it to my soul,
And thy great peril makes me bold to tell it.
Do not despise it in me!

ION.

With deep joy
Thus I receive it. Trust me, it is long
Since I have learn'd to tremble midst our pleasures,
Lest I should break the golden dream around me
With most ungrateful rashness. I should bless
The sharp and perilous duty which hath press'd

A life's deliciousness into these moments,—
Which here must end. I came to say farewell,
And the word must be said.

CLEMANTHE.

Thou canst not mean it!

Have I disclaim'd all maiden bashfulness
To tell the cherish'd secret of my soul
To my soul's master, and in rich return
Obtain'd the dear assurance of his love,
To hear him speak that miserable word,
I cannot—will not echo?

ION.

Heaven has call'd me,
And I have pledged my honor. When thy heart
Bestow'd its preference on a friendless boy,
Thou didst not image him a recreant; nor
Must he prove so, by thy election crown'd.
Thou hast endow'd me with the right to claim
Thy help through this our journey, be its course

Lengthen'd to age, or in an hour to end,
And now I ask it!—bid my courage hold,
And with thy free approval send me forth
In soul apparell'd for my office!

CLEMANTHE.

Go!

I would not have thee other than thou art,
Living or dying—and if thou shouldst fall—

ION.

Be sure I shall return.

CLEMANTHE.

If thou shouldst fall,
I shall be happier as the affianced bride
Of thy cold ashes, than in proudest fortunes—
Thine—ever thine— *[she faints in his arms.]*

ION. *[calls.]*

Abra!—So best to part—

[Enter ABRA.]

Let her have air; be near her through the day;
I know thy tenderness—should ill news come
Of any friend, she will require it all.

[ABRA *bears* CLEMANTHE *out*.

Ye Gods, that have enrich'd the life ye claim
With priceless treasure, strengthen me to yield it!

[*Exit*.

END OF ACT I.

ACT THE SECOND.

A C T I I.

SCENE I.

A Terrace of the Palace.

ADRASTUS, CRYTHES.

ADRASTUS.

THE air breathes freshly after our long night
Of glorious revelry. I'll walk awhile.

CRYTHES.

It blows across the town; dost thou not fear
It bear infection with it?

ADRASTUS.

Fear! dost talk
Of fear to me? I deem'd even thy poor thoughts

Had better scanu'd their master. Prithee tell me
In what act, word, or look, since I have borne
Thy converse here, hast thou discern'd such baseness
As makes thee bold to prate to me of fear?

CRYTHES.

My liege, of human might all know thee fearless,
But may not heroes shun the elements
When sickness taints them?

ADRASTUS.

Let them blast me now—

I stir not; tremble not; these massive walls,
Whose date o'erawes tradition, gird the home
Of a great race of kings, along whose line
The eager mind lives aching, through the darkness
Of ages else unstoried, till its shapes
Of armed sovereigns spread to godlike port,
And, frowning in the uncertain dawn of time,
Strike awe, as powers who ruled an elder world,
In mute obedience. I, sad heriter

Of all their glories, feel our doom is nigh ;
And I will meet it as befits their fame ;
Nor will I vary my selected path,
The breadth of my sword's edge, nor check a wish,
If such unkingly yielding might avert it.

CRYTHES.

Thou art ever royal in thy thoughts.

ADRASTUS.

No more—

I would be private.

[*Exit* CRYTHES.]

Grovelling parasite !

Why should I waste these fate-environ'd hours,
And pledge my great defiance to despair
With flatterers such as thou ;—as if my joys
Required the pale reflections cast by slaves
In mirror'd mockery round my throne, or lack'd
The aid of reptile sympathies to stream
Through fate's black pageantry. Let weakness seek
Companionship : I'll henceforth feast alone.

Enter a Soldier.

SOLDIER.

My liege, forgive me.

ADRASTUS.

Well! Speak out at once
Thy business, and retire.

SOLDIER.

I have no part
In the presumptuous message that I bear.

ADRASTUS.

Tell it, or go. There is no time to waste
On idle terrors.

SOLDIER.

Thus it is, my lord:—
As we were burnishing our arms, a man

Enter'd the court, and when we saw him first
Was tending towards the palace; in amaze,
We hail'd the rash intruder; still he walk'd
Unheeding onward, till the western gate
Barr'd further course; then turning, he besought
Our startled band to herald him to thee,
That he might urge a message which the sages
Had charged him to deliver.

ADRASTUS.

Ha! the greybeards
Who, mid the altars of the gods, conspire
To cast the image of supernal power
From earth its shadow consecrates. What sage
Is so resolved to play the orator
That he would die for 't?

SOLDIER.

He is but a youth,
Yet urged his prayer with a sad constancy
Which could not be denied.

ADRASTUS.

Most bravely plann'd !

Sedition worthy of the reverend host
Of sophist traitors ; brave to scatter fancies
Of discontent midst sturdy artisans,
Whose honest sinews they direct unseen,
And make their proxies in the work of peril !—
'Tis fit, when burning to insult their king,
And warn'd the pleasure must be bought with life,
Their valour send a boy to speak their wisdom !
Thou know'st my last decree ; tell this rash youth
The danger he incurs ;—then let him pass,
And own the king more gentle than his masters.

SOLDIER.

We have already told him of the fate
Which waits his daring ; courteously he thank'd us,
But still with solemn accent urged his suit.

ADRASTUS.

Tell him once more, if he persists, he dies—
Then, if he will, admit him. Should he hold
His purpose, order Crythes to conduct him,
And see the headsman instantly prepare
To do his office. [Exit SOLDIER.

So resolved, so young—
'Twere pity he should fall; yet he *must* fall,
Or the great sceptre, which hath sway'd the fears
Of ages, will become a common staff
For youth to wield or age to rest upon,
Despoil'd of all its virtues. He *must* fall,
Else they who prompt the insult will grow bold,
And with their pestilent vauntings through the city
Raise the low fog of murky discontent,
Which now creeps harmless through its marshy birth-
place,
To veil my setting glories. He is warn'd;
And if he cross yon threshold, he shall die.

Enter CRYTHES and ION.

CRYTHES.

The king!

ADRASTUS.

Stranger, I bid thee welcome;
We are about to tread the same dark passage,
Thou almost on the instant.—Is the sword

[*To* CRYTHES.

Of justice sharpen'd, and the headsman ready?

CRYTHES.

Thou mayst behold them plainly in the court;
Even now the solemn soldiers line the ground;
The steel gleams on the altar; and the slave
Disrobes himself for duty.

ADRASTUS. [*To* ION.]

Dost thou see them?

ION.

I do.

ADRASTUS.

By Heaven, he does not change!

If, even now, thou wilt depart and leave

Thy traitorous thoughts unspoken, thou art free.

ION.

I thank thee for thy offer; but I stand

Before thee for the lives of thousands, rich

In all that makes life precious to the brave;

Who perish not alone, but in their fall

Break the far-spreading tendrils that they feed,

And leave them nurtureless. If thou wilt hear me

For them, I am content to speak no more.

ADRASTUS.

Thou hast thy wish then. Crythes! till yon dial

Cast its thin shadow on the approaching hour,

D

I hear this gallant traitor. On the instant,
Come without word and lead him to his doom.
Now leave us.

CRYTHES.

What, alone !

ADRASTUS.

Yes, slave ! alone.

He is no assassin ! [Exit CRYTHES.

Tell me who thou art.

What generous source owns that heroic blood,
Which holds its course thus bravely ? What great wars
Have nursed the courage that can look on death,
Certain and speedy death, with placid eye ?

ION.

I am a simple youth, who never bore
The weight of armour,—one who may not boast
Of noble birth or valour of his own.
Deem not the powers which nerve me thus to speak

In thy great presence, and have made my heart
Upon the verge of bloody death as calm,
As equal in its beatings, as when sleep
Approach'd me nestling from the sportive toils
Of thoughtless childhood, and celestial dreams
Began to glimmer through the deepening shadows
Of soft oblivion, to belong to me !—
These are the strengths of Heaven ; to thee they speak,
Bid thee to hearken to thy people's cry,
Or warn thee that thy hour must shortly come !

ADRASTUS.

I know it must ; so mayst thou spare thy warnings ;
The envious gods in me have doom'd a race,
Whose glories stream from the same cloud-girt founts,
Whence their own dawn'd upon the infant world ;
And I shall sit on my ancestral throne
To meet their vengeance ; but till then I rule,
As I have ever ruled, and thou wilt feel.

ION.

I will not further urge thy safety to thee ;
It may be, as thou sayst, too late ; nor seek
To make thee tremble at the gathering curse
Which shall burst forth in mockery at thy fall ;
But thou art gifted with a nobler sense—
I know thou art, my sovereign—sense of pain
Endured by myriad Argives, in whose souls,
And in whose fathers' souls, thou and thy fathers
Have kept their cherish'd state ; whose heartstrings, still
The living fibres of thy rooted power,
Quiver with agonies thy crimes have drawn
From heavenly justice on them.

ADRASTUS.

How ! my crimes ?

ION.

Yes ; 'tis the eternal law that where guilt is,
Sorrow shall answer it ; and thou hast not

A poor man's privilege to bear alone,
Or in the narrow circle of his kinsmen,
The penalties of evil, for in thine
A nation's fate lies circled.—King Adrastus !
Mail'd as thy heart is with the usages
Of pomp and power, a few short summers since
Thou wert a child, and canst not be relentless.
O, if maternal love embraced thee then,
Think of the mothers who with eyes unwet
Glare o'er their perishing children : hast thou shared
The glow of a first friendship, which is born
Midst the rude sports of boyhood, think of youth
Smitten amidst its playthings ;—let the spirit
Of thy own innocent childhood whisper pity !

ADRASTUS.

In every word thou dost but steel my soul.
My youth was blasted ;— parents, brother, kin—
All that should people infancy with joy—
Conspired to poison mine ; despoil'd my life
Of innocence and hope—all but the sword

And sceptre—dost thou wonder at me now ?

ION.

I knew that we should pity—

ADRASTUS.

Pity ! dare

To speak that word again, and torture waits thee !

I am yet king of Argos. Well, go on—

Thy time is short, and I am pledged to hear.

ION.

If thou hast ever loved—

ADRASTUS.

Beware ! beware !

ION.

Thou hast ! I see thou hast ! Thou art not marble,

And thou shalt hear me !—Think upon the time

When the clear depths of thy yet lucid soul

Were ruffled with the troublings of strange joy,
As if some unseen visitant from heaven
Touch'd the calm lake and wreath'd its images
In sparkling waves ;—recall the dallying hope
That on the margin of assurance trembled,
As loth to lose in certainty too bless'd
Its happy being ;—taste in thought again
Of the stolen sweetness of those evening walks,
When pansied turf was air to winged feet,
And circling forests by etherial touch
Enchanted, wore the livery of the sky,
As if about to melt in golden light
Shapes of one heavenly vision ; and thy heart
Enlarged by its new sympathy with one,
Grew bountiful to all !

ADRASTUS.

That tone ! that tone !

Whence came it ? from thy lips ? It cannot be—
The long-hush'd music of the only voice
That ever spake unbought affection to me,

And waked my soul to blessing!—O sweet hours
Of golden joy, ye come! your glories break
Through my pavilion'd spirit's sable folds!
Roll on! roll on!—Stranger, thou dost enforce me
To speak of things unbreathed by lip of mine
To human ear;—wilt listen?

ION.

As a child.

ADRASTUS.

Again! that voice again!—thou hast seen me moved
As never mortal saw me, by a tone
Which some light breeze, enamour'd of the sound,
Hath wafted through the woods, till thy young voice
Caught it to rive and melt me. At my birth
This city, which, expectant of its Prince,
Lay hush'd, broke out in clamorous ecstacies;
Yet, in that moment, while the uplifted cups
Foam'd with the choicest product of the sun,
And welcome thundered from a thousand throats,

My doom was seal'd. From the hearth's vacant space,
In the dark chamber where my mother lay,
Faint with the sense of pain-bought happiness,
Came forth, in heart-appalling tone, these words
Of me the nurseling—"Woe unto the babe!
"Against the life which now begins shall life
"Lighted from thence be arm'd, and both soon quench'd,
"End this great line in sorrow!"—Ere I grew
Of years to know myself a thing accursed,
A second son was born, to steal the love
Which fate had else scarce rifled: he became
My parents' hope, the darling of the crew
Who lived upon their smiles, and thought it flattery
To trace in every foible of my youth—
A prince's youth!—the workings of the curse;
My very mother—Jove! I cannot bear
To speak it now—look'd freezingly upon me!

ION.

But thy brother—

ADRASTUS.

Died. Thou hast heard the lie,
The common lie that every peasant tells
Of me his master,—that I slew the boy.
'Tis false :—one summer's eve, below a crag
Which, in his wilful mood, he strove to climb,
He lay a mangled corpse : the very slaves,
Whose cruelty had shut him from my heart,
Now coin'd their own injustice into proofs
To brand me as his murderer.

ION.

Did they dare
Accuse thee ?

ADRASTUS.

Not in open speech :—they felt
I should have seized the miscreant by the throat,
And crush'd the lie half-spoken with the life
Of the base speaker ;—but the tale look'd out

From the stolen gaze of coward eyes, which shrunk
When mine has met them; murmur'd through the crowd
That at the sacrifice, or feast, or game
Stood distant from me; burnt into my soul
When I beheld it in my father's shudder.

ION.

Didst not declare thy innocence?

ADRASTUS.

To whom?

To parents who could doubt me? To the ring
Of grave impostors, or their shallow sons,
Who should have studied to prevent my wish
Before it grew to language; hail'd my choice
To service as a prize to wrestle for;
And whose reluctant courtesy I bore,
Pale with proud anger, till from lips compress'd
The blood has started? To the common herd,
The vassals of our ancient house, the mass
Of bones and muscles framed to till the soil

A few brief years, then rot unnamed beneath it,
Or, deck'd for slaughter at their monarch's call,
To smite and to be smitten, and lie crush'd
In heaps to swell his glory or his shame?
Answer to them : No ! though my heart had burst,
As it was nigh to bursting !—To the mountains
I fled, and on their pinnacles of snow
Breasted the icy wind, in hope to cool
My spirit's fever—struggled with the oak
In search of weariness, and learn'd to rive
Its stubborn boughs, till limbs once lightly strung
Might mate in cordage with its infant stems ;
Or on the sea-beat rock tore off the vest
Which burnt upon my bosom, and to air
Headlong committed, clove the water's depth
Which plummet never sounded ;—but in vain.

ION.

Yet succour came to thee?

ADRASTUS.

A blessed one !

Which the strange magic of thy voice revives,
And thus unlocks my soul. My rapid steps
Were in a wood-encircled valley stayed
By the bright vision of a maid, whose face
Most lovely more than loveliness reveal'd,
In touch of patient grief, which dearer seem'd
Than happiness to spirit sear'd like mine.
With feeble hands she strove to lay in earth
The body of her aged sire, whose death
Left her alone. I aided her sad work,
And soon two lonely ones by holy rites
Became one happy being. Days, weeks, months,
In streamlike unity flow'd silent by us
In our delightful nest. My father's spies—
Slaves, whom my nod should have consign'd to stripes
Or the swift falchion—track'd our sylvan home
Just as my bosom knew its second joy,
And, spite of fortune, I embraced a son

ION.

Urged by thy trembling parents to avert
That dreadful prophecy?

ADRASTUS.

Fools! did they deem
Its worst accomplishment could match the ill
Which they wrought on me? It had left unharm'd
A thousand ecstacies of passion'd years,
Which, tasted once, live ever, and disdain
Fate's iron grapple! Could I now behold
That son with knife uplifted at my heart,
A moment ere my life-blood follow'd it,
I would embrace him with my dying eyes,
And pardon destiny! While jocund smiles
Wreathed on the infant's face, as if sweet spirits
Suggested pleasant fancies to its soul,
The ruffians broke upon us; seized the child;
Dash'd through the thicket to the beetling rock
'Neath which the deep wave eddies: I stood still

As stricken into stone : I heard him cry,
Press'd by the rudeness of the murderers' gripe,
Severer ill unfearing—then the splash
Of waters that shall cover him for ever ;
And could not stir to save him !

ION.

And the mother—

ADRASTUS.

She spake no word, but clasp'd me in her arms,
And lay her down to die. A lingering gaze
Of love she fix'd on me—none other loved,
And so pass'd hence. By Jupiter, her look !
Her dying patience glimmers in thy face !
She lives again ! She looks upon me now !
There 's magic in't. Bear with me—I am childish.

Enter CRYTHES and Guards.

ADRASTUS.

Why art thou here ?

CRYTHES.

The dial points the hour.

ADRASTUS.

Dost thou not see that horrid purpose pass'd ?

Hast thou no heart—no sense ?

CRYTHES.

Scarce half an hour

Hath flown since the command on which I wait.

ADRASTUS.

Scarce half an hour !—years—years have roll'd since then.

Begone ; remove that pageantry of death—

It blasts my sight—and hearken ! Touch a hair

Of this brave youth, or look on him as now

With thy cold headsman's eye, and yonder band

Shall not expect a fearful show in vain.

Hence without word.

[*Exit* CRYTHES.]

What wouldst thou have me do ?

ION.

Let thy awaken'd heart speak its own language;
Convene thy sages;—frankly, nobly meet them;
Explore with them the pleasure of the gods,
And, whatsoe'er the sacrifice, perform it.

ADRASTUS.

Well! I will seek their presence in an hour;
Go summon them, young hero:—hold! no word
Of the strange passion thou hast witness'd here.

ION.

Distrust me not.—Benignant Powers, I thank ye! [*Exit.*

ADRASTUS.

Yet stay—he's gone—his spell is on me yet;
What have I promised him? To meet the men
Who from my living head would strip the crown
And sit in judgment on me?—I must do it—
Yet shall my band be ready to o'erawe

E

The course of liberal speech, and, if it rise
So as too loudly to offend my ear,
Strike the rash brawler dead !—what idle dream
Of long-past days had melted me ? It fades—
It vanishes—I am again a king !

SCENE II.

The interior of the Temple.

[Same as ACT I. SCENE I.]

[CLEMANTHE seated—ABRA attending her.]

ABRA.

Look, dearest lady!—the thin smoke aspires
In the calm air, as when in happier times
It show'd the gods propitious; wilt thou seek
Thy chamber, lest thy father and his friends,
Returning, find us hinderers of their council?
She answers not—she hearkens not—with joy
Could I believe her, for the first time, sullen!—
Still she is rapt.

[Enter AGENOR.]

O, speak to my sweet mistress,

Haply thy voice may rouse her.

AGENOR.

Dear Clemanthe,

Hope dawns in every omen ; we shall hail

Our tranquil hours again.

[*Enter MEDON, CLEON, TIMOCLES, and others.*]

MEDON.

Clemanthe here !

How sad ! how pale !

ABRA.

Her eye is kindling—hush !

CLEMANTHE.

Hark ! hear ye not a distant footstep ?

MEDON.

No.

Look round, my fairest child ; thy friends are near thee.

CLEMANTHE.

Yes !—now 'tis lost—'tis on that endless stair—

Nearer and more distinct—'tis his—'tis his—

He lives ! he comes !

[CLEMANTHE rises and rushes to the back of the stage,
at which ION appears, and returns with him.]

Here is your messenger,

Whom Heaven has rescued from the tyrant's rage

Ye sent him forth to brave. Rejoice, old men,

That ye are guiltless of his blood !—why pause ye,

Why shout ye not his welcome ?

MEDON.

Dearest girl,

This is no scene for thee ; go to thy chamber,

I 'll come to thee ere long.

[Exeunt CLEMANTHE and ABRA.]

She is o'erwrought

By fear and joy for one whose infant hopes
Were mingled with her own, even as a brother's.

TIMOCLES.

Ion !

How shall we do thee honor ?

ION.

None is due

Save to the gods whose gracious influence sways
The king ye deem'd relentless ;—he consents
To meet ye presently in council : speed ;
This may be nature's latest rally in him,
In fitful strength, ere it be quench'd for ever !

MEDON.

Haste to your seats ; I will but speak a word
With our brave friend, and follow ; though convened
In speed, let our assembly lack no forms
Of due observance, which to furious power

Plead with the silent emphasis of years.

[*Exeunt all but MEDON and ION.*

ION, draw near me ; this eventful day
Hath shown thy nature's graces circled round
With firmness which accomplishes the hero ;—
And it would bring to me but one proud thought
That virtues which required not culture's aid
Shed their first fragrance 'neath my roof, and there
Found shelter ;—but it also hath reveal'd
What I may not hide from thee, that my child,
My blithe and innocent girl—more fair in soul,
More delicate in fancy than in mould—
Loves thee with other than a sister's love.
I should have cared for this : I vainly deem'd
A fellowship in childhood's thousand joys
And household memories had nurtured friendship
Which might hold blameless empire in the soul ;
But in that guise the traitor hath stolen in,
And the fair citadel is thine.

ION.

'Tis true.

I did not think the nurseling of thy house
Could thus disturb its holiest inmate's duty
With tale of selfish passion ;—but we met
As playmates who might never meet again,
And then the hidden truth flash'd forth, and show'd
To each the image in the other's soul
In one bright instant.

MEDON.

Be that instant blest
Which made thee truly ours. My son ! my son !
'Tis we should feel uplifted, for the seal
Of greatness is upon thee ; yet I know
That when the gods, won by thy virtues, draw
The veil which now conceals their lofty birthplace,
Thou wilt not spurn the maid who prized them lowly.

ION.

Spurn her ! My father !

[*Enter CTESIPHON.*]

MEDON.

Ctesiphon !—and breathless—

Art come to chide me to the council ?

CTESIPHON.

No ;

To bring unwonted joy ; thy son approaches.

MEDON.

Thank Heaven ! Hast spoken with him ? Is he well ?

CTESIPHON.

I strove in vain to reach him, for the crowd,
Roused from the untended couch and dismal hearth
By the strange visiting of hope, press'd round him ;
But, by his head erect and fiery glance,

I know that he is well, and that he bears
A message which shall shake the tyrant. [*Shouts.*] See!
The throng is tending this way—now it parts,
And yields him to thy arms.

Enter PHOCION.

MEDON.

Welcome, my Phocion—
 Long waited for in Argos; how detain'd
 Now matters not, since thou art here in joy.
 Hast brought the answer of the god?

PHOCION.

I have :
Now let Adrastus tremble !

MEDON.

May we hear it?

PHOCION.

I am sworn first to utter it to him.

CTESIPHON.

But it is fatal to him !—Say but that !

PHOCION.

Ha, Ctesiphon !—I mark'd thee not before ;
How fares thy father ?

ION. [*To Phocion.*]

Do not speak of him.

CTESIPHON. [*Overhearing Ion.*]

Not speak of him ! Dost think there is a moment
When common things eclipse the burning thought
Of him and vengeance ?

PHOCION.

Has the tyrant's sword—

CTESIPHON.

No, Phocion ; that were merciful and brave

Compared to his base deed ; yet will I tell it
To make the flashing of thine eye more deadly,
And edge thy words that they may rive his heartstrings.
The last time that Adrastus dared to face
The sages of the state, although my father,
Yielding to nature's mild decay, had left
All worldly toil and hope, he gather'd strength,
In his old seat, to speak one word of warning.
Thou knowest how bland with years his wisdom grew,
And with what phrases, steep'd in love, he sheath'd
The sharpness of rebuke ; yet, ere his speech
Was closed, the tyrant started from his throne,
And with his base hand smote him ;—'twas his death-
stroke !
The old man totter'd home, and only once
Raised his head after.

PHOCION.

Thou wert absent ? Yes !

For the proud miscreant lives !

CTESIPHON.

Had I beheld

That sacrilege, the tyrant had lain dead,
Or I had been torn piecemeal by his minions.
But I was far away : when I return'd,
I found my father on the nearest bench
Within our door, his thinly silver'd head
Supported by wan hands, which hid his face
And would not be withdrawn ;—no groan, no sigh
Was audible, and we might only learn
By short convulsive tremblings of his frame
That life still flicker'd in it—yet at last,
By some unearthly inspiration roused,
He dropp'd his wither'd hands, and sat erect
As in his manhood's glory—the free blood
Flush'd crimson through his cheeks, his furrow'd brow
Expanded clear, and his eyes opening full
Gleam'd with a youthful fire ;—I fell in awe
Upon my knees before him—still he spake not,
But slowly raised his arm untrembling ; clench'd

His hand as if it grasp'd an airy knife,
And struck in air ; my hand was join'd with his
In nervous grasp—my lifted eye met his,
In stedfast gaze—my pressure answer'd his—
We knew at once each other's thought ; a smile
Of the old sweetness play'd upon his lips,
And life forsook him. Weaponless I flew
To seek the tyrant, and was driven with scoffs
From the proud gates which shelter him. He lives—
And I am here to babble of revenge !

PHOCION.

It comes, my friend—haste with me to the king !

ION.

Even while we speak, Adrastus meets his council ;
There let us seek him : should ye find him touch'd
With penitence, as happily ye may,
O, give allowance to his soften'd nature !

CTESIPHON.

Show grace to him !—Dost dare ?—I had forgot,
Thou dost not know how a son loves a father !

ION.

I know enough to feel for thee ; I know
Thou hast endured the vilest wrong that tyranny
In its worst frenzy can inflict ;—yet think,
O think ! before the irrevocable deed
Shuts out all thought, how much of power's excess
Is theirs who raise the idol :—do we groan
Beneath the personal force of this rash man,
Who forty summers since hung at the breast
A playful weakling ; whom the heat unnerves ;
The north-wind pierces ; and the hand of death
May, in a moment, change to clay as vile
As that of the scourged slave whose chains it severs ?
No ! 'tis our weakness gasping for the shows
Of outward strength that builds up tyranny,

And makes it look so glorious :—If we shrink
Faint-hearted from the reckoning of our span
Of mortal days, we pamper the fond wish
For long duration in a line of kings :
If the rich pageantry of thoughts must fade
All unsubstantial as the regal hues
Of eve which purpled them, our cunning frailty
Must robe a living image with their pomp,
And wreath a diadem around its brow,
In which our sunny fantasies may live
Empearl'd, and gleam, in fatal splendor, far
On after ages. We must look *within*
For that which makes us slaves ;—on sympathies
Which find no kindred objects in the plain
Of common life—affections that aspire
In air too thin—and fancy's dewy film
Floating for rest ; for even such delicate threads,
Gather'd by fate's engrossing hand, supply
The eternal spindle whence she weaves the bond
Of cable strength in which our nature struggles !

CTESIPHON.

Go talk to others if thou wilt;—to me
All argument, save that of steel, is idle.

MEDON.

No more;—let's to the council—there, my son,
Tell thy great message nobly;—and for thee,
Poor orphan'd youth, be sure the gods are just!

[Exeunt.]

SCENE III.

The great Square of the City. ADRASTUS seated on a throne; AGENOR, TIMOCLES, CLEON, and others, seated as Councillors—Soldiers line the stage at a distance.

ADRASTUS.

Upon your summons, Sages, I am here;
Your king attends to know your pleasure—speak it!

AGENOR.

And canst thou ask? If the heart dead within thee
Receives no impress of this awful time,
Art thou of sense forsaken? Are thine ears
So charm'd by strains of slavish minstrelsy
That the dull groan and frenzy-pointed shriek
Pass them unheard to Heaven? Or are thine eyes
So conversant with prodigies of grief,

They cease to dazzle at them? Art thou arm'd
'Gainst wonder, while, in all things, nature turns
To dreadful contraries ;—while Youth's full cheek
Is shrivell'd into furrows of sad years,
And 'neath its glossy curls untinged by care
Looks out a keen anatomy ;—while Age
Is stung by feverish torture for an hour
Into youth's strength ; while fragile Womanhood
Starts into frightful courage, all unlike
The gentle strength its gentle weakness feeds
To make affliction beautiful, and stalks
Abroad, a tearless, an unshuddering thing ;—
While Childhood, in its orphan'd freedom blithe,
Finds, in the shapes of wretchedness which seem
Grotesque to its unsadden'd vision, cause
For dreadful mirth that shortly shall be hush'd
In never-broken silence ; and while Love,
Immortal through all change, makes ghastly Death
Its idol, and with furious passion digs
Amid sepulchral images for gauds

To cheat its fancy with?—Do sights like these
Glare through the realm thou shouldst be parent to,
And canst thou find the voice to ask “our pleasure?”

ADRASTUS.

Cease, babbler;—wherefore would ye stun my ears
With vain recital of the griefs I know,
And cannot heal?—will treason turn aside
The shafts of fate, or medicine Nature’s ills?
I have no skill in pharmacy, nor power
To sway the elements.

AGENOR.

Thou hast the power
To cast thyself upon the earth with us
In penitential shame; or, if this power
Hath left a heart made weak by luxury
And hard by pride, thou had at least the power
To cease the mockery of thy frantic revels.

ADRASTUS.

I have yet power to punish insult—look,
I use it not, Agenor!—Fate may dash
My sceptre from me, but shall not command
My will to hold it with a feebler grasp;
Nay, if few hours of empire yet are mine,
They shall be colour'd with a sterner pride;
And peopled with more lustrous joys than flush'd
In the serene procession of its greatness,
Which look'd perpetual, as the flowing course
Of human things. Have ye beheld a pine
That clasp'd the mountain summit with a root
As firm as its rough marble, and apart
From the huge shade of undistinguish'd trees,
Lifted its head as in delight to share
The evening glories of the sky, and taste
The wanton dalliance of the heavenly breeze
That no ignoble vapour from the vale
Could mingle with—smit by the flaming marl
And lighted for destruction? How it stood

One glorious moment, fringed and wreathed with fire
Which show'd the inward graces of its shape,
Uncumber'd now, and midst its topmost boughs
That young Ambition's airy fancies made
Their giddy nest, leap'd sportive ;—never clad
By liberal summer in a pomp so rich
As waited on its downfall, while it took
The storm-cloud roll'd behind it for a curtain
To gird its splendors round, and made the blast
Its minister to whirl its flashing shreds
Aloft towards heaven, or to the startled depths
Of forests that afar might share its doom !
So shall the royalty of Argos pass
In festal blaze to darkness. Have ye spoken ?

AGENOR.

I speak no more to thee !—Great Jove, look down !

[Shouting without.]

ADRASTUS.

What factious brawl is this ?—disperse it, soldiers.

[*Shouting renewed -- As some of the soldiers are about to march, PHOCION rushes in, followed by CTESIPHON, ION, and MEDON.*]

Whence is this insolent intrusion?

PHOCION.

King!

I bear Apollo's answer to thy prayer.

ADRASTUS.

Has not thy travel taught thy knee its duty?

Here we had school'd thee better.

PHOCION.

Kneel to thee!

MEDON.

Patience, my son! Do homage to the king.

PHOCION.

Never!—thou talk'st of schooling—know, Adrastus,
That I have studied in a nobler school
Than the dull haunt of venal sophistry
Or the lewd guard-room;—o'er which ancient heaven
Extends its arch for all, and mocks the span
Of palaces and dungeons; where the heart
In its free beatings, 'neath the coarsest vest,
Claims kindred with diviner things than power
Of kings can raise or stifle—in the school
Of mighty Nature—where I learn'd to blush
At sight like this of thousands basely hush'd
Before a man no mightier than themselves,
Save in the absence of the love that softens.

ADRASTUS.

Peace! speak thy message.

PHOCION.

Shall I tell it here?

Or shall I seek thy couch at dead of night
And breathe it in low whispers?—As thou wilt.

ADRASTUS.

Here—and this instant!

PHOCION.

Hearken then, Adrastus,
And hearken, Argives—thus Apollo speaks!

[*Reads a scroll.*]

“ Argos ne’er shall find release
“ Till her monarch’s race shall cease.”

ADRASTUS.

’Tis not God’s will, but man’s sedition speaks:—
Guards! tear that lying parchment from his hands,
And bear him to the palace.

MEDON.

Touch him not,—
He is Apollo’s messenger, whose lips

Were never stain'd with falsehood.

PHOCION.

Come on, all !

AGENOR.

Surround him, friends ! Die with him !

ADRASTUS.

Soldiers, charge

Upon these rebels ; hew them down. On, on !

The soldiers advance and surround the people ; they seize PHOCION. ION rushes from the back of the stage, and throws himself between ADRASTUS and PHOCION.

PHOCION to ADRASTUS.

Yet I defy thee.

ION.

[To PHOCION.] Friend ! for sake of all,

Enrage him not—wait while I speak a word—

[To ADRASTUS.] My sovereign, I implore thee, do not
stain

This sacred place with blood ; in Heaven's great name

I do conjure thee—and in *hers*, whose spirit

Is mourning for thee now !

ADRASTUS.

Release the stripling—

Let him go spread his treason where he will :

He is not worth my anger. To the palace !

ION.

Nay, yet an instant !—let my speech have power

From Heaven to move thee further : thou hast heard

The sentence of the god, and thy heart owns it ;

If thou wilt cast aside this cumbrous pomp,

And in seclusion purify thy soul

Long fever'd and sophisticate, the gods

May give thee space for penitential thoughts ;

If not—as surely as thou standest here,

Wilt thou lie stiff and weltering in thy blood.—

The vision presses on me now.

ADRASTUS.

Art mad ?

Resign my state ? Sue to the gods for life,

The common life which every slave endures,

And meanly clings to ? No ; within yon walls

I shall resume the banquet, never more

Broken by man's intrusion. Councillors,

Farewell !—go mutter treason till ye perish !

[*Exeunt ADRASTUS, CRYTHES, and Soldiers.*

ION, *who stands apart leaning on a pedestal.*

'Tis seal'd !

MEDON.

Let us withdraw, and strive

By sacrifice to pacify the gods !

MEDON, AGENOR, *and Councillors retire: they leave*
CTESIPHON, PHOCION, *and ION. ION still stands*
apart, as rapt in meditation.

CTESIPHON.

'Tis well ; the measure of his guilt is fill'd.

Where shall we meet at sunset ?

PHOCION.

In the grove

Which with its matted shade imbrowns the vale,
Between those buttresses of rock that guard
The sacred mountain on its western side,
Stands a rude altar—overgrown with moss,
And stain'd with drippings of a million showers,
So old, that no tradition names the power
That hallow'd it,—which we will consecrate
Anew to freedom and to justice.

CTESIPHON.

Thither

Will I bring friends to meet thee. Shall we speak
To yon rapt youth? [*pointing to ION.*

PHOCION.

His nature is too gentle.
At sunset we will meet.—With arms?

CTESIPHON.

A knife—
One sacrificial knife will serve.

PHOCION.

At sunset!

[*Exeunt CTESIPHON and PHOCION severally.*

ION comes forward.

ION.

O wretched man, thy words have seal'd thy doom!
Why should I shiver at it, when no way,
Save this, remains to break the ponderous cloud

That hangs above my wretched country?—death—
A single death, the common lot of all,
Which it will not be mine to look upon,—
And yet its ghastly shape dilates before me ;
I cannot shut it out ; my thoughts grow rigid,
And as that grim and prostrate figure haunts them,
My sinews stiffen like it. Courage, Ion !
No spectral form is here ; all outward things
Wear their own old familiar looks ; no dye
Pollutes them. Yet the air has scent of blood,
And now it eddies with a hurtling sound,
As if some weapon swiftly clove it. No—
The falchion's course is silent as the grave
That yawns before its victim. Gracious powers !
If the great duty of my life be near,
Grant it may be to suffer, not to strike ! [Exit.

END OF ACT II.

ACT THE THIRD.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A terrace of the Temple.

CLEMANTHE, ION.

CLEMANTHE.

NAY, I must chide this sorrow from thy brow,
Or 'twill rebuke my happiness;—I know
Too well the miseries that hem us round;
And yet the inward sunshine of my soul,
Unclouded by their melancholy shadows,
Bathes in its deep tranquillity one image—
One only image, which no outward storm
Can ever ruffle. Let me wean thee, then,
From this vain pondering o'er the general woe,
Which makes my joy look ugly.

ION.

No, my fair one,
The gloom that wrongs thy love is unredeem'd
By generous sense of others' woe : too sure
It rises from dark presages within,
And will not from me.

CLEMANTHE.

Then it is most groundless !
Hast thou not won the blessings of the perishing
By constancy, the fame of which shall live
While a heart beats in Argos ?—hast thou not
Upon one agitated bosom pour'd
The sweetest peace ? and can thy generous nature,
While it thus sheds felicity around it,
Remain itself unblest'd ?

ION.

I strove awhile
To think the assured possession of thy love

With too divine a burthen weigh'd my heart
And press'd my spirits down ;—but 'tis not so ;
Nor will I with false tenderness beguile thee,
By feigning that my sadness has a cause
So exquisite. Clemanthe ! thou wilt find me
A sad companion ;—I who knew not life,
Save as the sportive breath of happiness,
Now feel my minutes teeming, as they rise,
With grave experiences ; I dream no more
Of azure realms where restless beauty sports
In myriad shapes fantastic ; but black vaults
In long succession open till the gloom
Afar is broken by a streak of fire
That shapes my name—the fearful wind that moans
Before the storm articulates its sound ;
And as I pass'd but now the solemn range
Of Argive monarchs, that in sculptured mockery
Of present empire sit, their eyes of stone
Bent on me instinct with a frightful life
That drew me into fellowship with them,

As conscious marble ; while their ponderous lips—
Fit organs of eternity—unclosed,
And, as I live to tell thee, murmur'd “ Hail !
Hail ! Ion the Devoted ! ”

CLEMANTHE.

These are fancies,
Which thy soul, late expanded with great purpose,
Shapes, as it quivers to its natural circle
In which its joys should lurk, as in the bud
The cells of fragrance cluster. Bid them from thee,
And strive to be thyself.

ION.

I will do so !
I 'll gaze upon thy loveliness, and drink
Its quiet in ;—how beautiful thou art !—
My pulse throbs now as it was wont ;—a being,
Which owns so fair a glass to mirror it,
Cannot show darkly.

CLEMANTHE.

We shall soon be happy ;

My father will rejoice to bless our love,

And Argos waken ;—for her tyrant's course

Must have a speedy end.

ION.

It must ! It must !

CLEMANTHE.

Yes ; for no empty talk of public wrongs

Assails him now ; keen hatred and revenge

Are roused to crush him.

ION.

Not by such base agents

May the august lustration be achieved :

He who shall cleanse his country from the guilt

For which Heaven smites her, should be pure of soul,

Guileless as infancy, and undisturb'd
By personal anger as thy father is,
When, with unswerving hand and piteous eye,
He stops the brief life of the innocent kid
Bound with white fillets to the altar ;—so
Enwreathed by fate the royal victim heaves,
And soon his breast shall shrink beneath the knife
Of the selected slayer !

CLEMANTHE.

'Tis thyself

Whom thy strange language pictures—Ion ! thou—

ION.

She has said it ! Her pure lips have spoken out
What all things intimate ;—didst thou not mark
Me for the office of avenger—*me* ?

CLEMANTHE.

No ;—save from the wild picture that thy fancy—
Thy o'erwrought fancy drew ; I thought it look'd

Too like thee, and I shudder'd.

ION.

So do I !

And yet I almost wish I shudder'd more,
For the dire thought has grown familiar with me—
Could I escape it !

CLEMANTHE.

'Twill away in sleep.

ION.

No, no ! I dare not sleep—for well I know
That then the knife will gleam, the blood will gush,
The form will stiffen !—I will walk awhile
In the sweet evening light, and try to chase
These fearful images away.

CLEMANTHE.

Let me

Go with thee. O, how often hand in hand

In such a lovely light have we roam'd westward
Aimless and blessed, when we were no more
Than playmates :—surely we are not grown stranger
Since yesterday !

ION.

No, dearest, not to-night :
The plague yet rages fiercely in the vale,
And I am placed in grave commission here
To watch the gates ;—indeed thou must not pass ;
I will be merrier when we meet again,—
Trust me, my love, I will ; farewell ! [*Exit* ION.

CLEMANTHE.

Farewell then !

How fearful disproportion shows in one
Whose life hath been all harmony ! He bends
Towards that thick covert where in blessed hour
My father found him, which has ever been
His chosen place of musing. Shall I follow ?
Am I already grown a selfish mistress,

To watch his solitude with jealous eye,
And claim him all? That let me never be—
Yet danger from within besets him now,
Known to me only—I will follow him.

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

An opening in a deep wood—in front an old grey altar.

Enter ION.

ION.

O winding pathways, o'er whose scanty blades
Of unaspiring grass mine eyes have bent
So often when my musing fancy sway'd,
That craved alliance with no wider scene
Than your fair thickets border'd, but was pleased
To deem the toilsome years of manhood flown,
And, on the pictured mellowness of age
Idly reflective, image my return
From careful wanderings, to find ye gleam
With unchanged aspect on a heart unchanged,
And melt the busy past to a sweet dream
As then the future was ;—why should ye now
Echo my steps with melancholy sound

As ye were conscious of a guilty presence?
The lovely light of eve, that, as it waned,
Touch'd ye with softer, homelier look, now fades
In dismal blackness; and yon twisted roots
Of ancient trees, with whose fantastic forms
My thoughts grew humorous, look terrible,
As if about to start to serpent life,
And hiss around me;—whither shall I turn—
Where fly?—I see the myrtle-cradled spot
Where human love instructed by divine
Found and embraced me first; I'll cast me down
Upon that earth as on a mother's breast,
In hope to feel myself again a child.

[ION goes into the wood.

Enter CTESIPHON, CASSANDER, and other Argive youths.

CTESIPHON.

Sure this must be the place that Phocion spoke of;—
The twilight deepens, yet he does not come.
O, if instead of idle dreams of freedom,
He knew the sharpness of a grief like mine,

He would not linger thus !

CASSANDER.

The sun's broad disk
Of misty red, a few brief minutes since,
Sunk 'neath the leaden wave ; but night steals on
With rapid pace to veil us, and thy thoughts
Are eager as the favouring darkness.

Enter PHOCION.

CTESIPHON.

Welcome !

'Thou know'st all here.

PHOCION.

Yes ; I rejoice, Cassander,
To find thee my companion in a deed
Worthy of all the dreamings of old days,
When we, two rebel youths, grew safely brave
In visionary perils. We'll not shame
Our young imaginations. Ctesiphon,

We look to thee for guidance in our aim.

CTESIPHON.

I bring you glorious news. There is a soldier,
Who, in his reckless boyhood, was my comrade,
And though by taste of luxury subdued
Even to brook the tyrant's service, burns
With generous anger to avenge that grief
I bear above all others. He has made
The retribution sure. From him I learnt
That when Adrastus reach'd his palace court,
He paused, to struggle with some mighty throe
Of passion; then call'd eagerly for wine,
And bade his soldiers share his choicest stores,
And snatch, like him, a day from fortune. Soon
As one worn out by watching and excess,
He stagger'd to his couch, where now he lies
Oppress'd with heavy sleep, while his loose soldiers,
Made by the fierce carousal vainly mad
Or grossly dull, are scatter'd through the courts.
Unarm'd and cautionless. The eastern portal

Is at this moment open ; by that gate
We all may enter unperceived, and line
The passages which gird the royal chamber,
While one blest hand within completes the doom
Which Heaven pronounces. Nothing now remains,
But that as all would share this action's glory,
We join in one great vow, and choose one arm
Our common minister. O, may these sorrows
Confer on me the office to return
Upon the tyrant's shivering heart the blow
Which crush'd my father's spirit : I will leave
To him who cares for toys—the patriot's laurel
And the applause of ages !

PHOCION.

Let the gods
By the old course of lot reveal the name
Of the predestined champion. For myself,
Here do I solemnly devote all powers
Of soul and body to that glorious purpose
We live but to fulfil.

CTESIPHON.

And I!

CASSANDER.

And I!

ION.

[*Who has advanced from the wood, rushes to the altar,
and exclaims*]

And I!

PHOCION.

Most welcome! The serenest powers of justice,
In prompting thy unspotted soul to join
Our bloody councils, sanctify and bless them!

ION.

The gods have prompted me; for they have given
One dreadful voice to all things which should be

H

Else dumb or musical ; and I rejoice
To step from the grim round of waking dreams
Into this fellowship which makes all clear.
Wilt trust me, Ctesiphon ?

CTESIPHON.

Yes ; but we waste
The precious minutes in vain talk ; if lots
Must guide us, have ye scrolls ?

PHOCION.

Cassander has them ;
The flickering light of yonder glade will serve him
To inscribe them with our names. Be quick, Cassander !

CTESIPHON.

I wear a casque, beneath whose iron circlet
My father's dark hairs whiten'd ; let it hold
The names of his avengers !

*[Ctesiphon takes off his helmet and gives it to Cassander,
who retires with it.]*

PHOCION *[to Ctesiphon.]*

He whose name
Thou shalt draw first shall fill the post of glory.
Were it not also well, the second name
Should designate another charged to take
The same great office, if the first should leave
His work imperfect?

CTESIPHON.

There can scarce be need ;
Yet as thou wilt. May the first chance be mine ;
I will leave little for a second arm !
[Cassander returns with the helmet.]

CTESIPHON.

Now gods, decide !

[CTESIPHON draws a lot from the helmet.]

PHOCION.

The name? Why dost thou pause?

CTESIPHON.

'Tis Ion!

ION.

Well, I knew it would be mine!

[CTESIPHON *draws another lot.*

CTESIPHON.

Phocion! it will be thine to strike *him* dead

If he should prove faint-hearted.

PHOCION.

With my life

I'll answer for his constancy.

CTESIPHON [*to ION.*]

Thy hand!

"Tis cold as death.

ION.

Yes; but it is as firm.

What ceremony next?

[CTESIPHON *leads ION to the altar, and gives him a knife.*

CTESIPHON.

Receive this steel

For ages dedicate in my sad home
To sacrificial uses; grasp it nobly,
And consecrate it to untrembling service
Against the king of Argos and his race.

ION.

His race! Is he not left alone on earth?
He hath no brother and no child.

CTESIPHON.

Such words

The god hath used who never speaks in vain.

PHOCION.

There were old rumours of an infant born
And strangely vanishing ;—a tale of guilt
Half-hush'd, perchance distorted in the hushing,
And by the wise scarce heeded, for they deem'd it
One of a thousand guilty histories,
Which, if the walls of palaces could speak,
Would show that nursed by prideful luxury,
To pamper which the virtuous peasant toils,
Crimes grow unpunish'd which the pirates' nest,
Or want's foul hovel, or the cell which Justice
Keeps for unlicensed guilt, would startle at !
We must root out the stock, that no stray scion
Renew the tree, whose branches, stifling virtue,
Shed poison-dews on joy.

[ION approaches the altar, and, lifting up the knife, speaks.

Ye eldest gods,

Who in no statues of exactest form
Are palpable ; who shun the azure heights

Of beautiful Olympus, and the sound
Of ever-young Apollo's minstrelsy ;
Yet, mindful of the empire which ye held
Over dim Chaos, keep revengeful watch
On falling nations, and on kingly lines
About to sink for ever ; ye, who shed
Into the passions of earth's giant brood
And their fierce usages the sense of justice ;
Who clothe the fated battlements of tyranny
With blackness as a funeral pall, and breathe
Through the proud halls of time-embolden'd guilt
Portents of ruin, hear me !—In your presence,
For now I feel ye nigh, I dedicate
This arm to the destruction of the king
And of his race ! O keep me pitiless,
Expel all human weakness from my frame,
That this keen weapon shake not when his heart
Should feel its point ; and if he has a child
Whose blood is needful to the sacrifice
My country asks, harden my soul to shed it !—
Was not that thunder ?

CTESIPHON.

No; I heard no sound.

Now mark me, Ion!—thou shalt straight be led
To the king's chamber; we shall be at hand;
Nothing can give thee pause. Hold! one should watch
The city's eastern portal, lest the troops
Returning from the work of plunder home
Surround us unprepared. Be that thy duty.

[To PHOCION.

PHOCION.

I am to second Ion if he fail.

CTESIPHON.

He cannot fail;—I shall be nigh. What, Ion!

ION.

Who spake to me? Where am I? Friends, your pardon:
I am prepared; yet grant me for a moment,
One little moment, to be left alone.

CTESIPHON.

Be brief then, or the season of revenge
Will pass. At yonder thicket we 'll expect thee.

[*Exeunt all but ION.*

ION.

Methinks I breathe more freely, now my lot
Is palpable, and mortals gird me round,
Though my soul owns no sympathy with theirs.
Some one approaches—I must hide this knife—
Hide! I have ne'er till now had aught to hide
From any human eye. [*He conceals the knife in his vest.*

[*Enter CLEMANTHE.*]

Clemanthe here!

CLEMANTHE.

Forgive me that I break upon thee thus:
I meant to watch thy steps unseen; but night
Is thickening; thou art haunted by sad fancies,

And 'tis more terrible to think upon thee
Wandering with such companions in thy bosom,
Than in the peril thou art wont to seek
Beside the bed of death.

ION.

Death, say'st thou? Death?

Is it not righteous when the gods decree it?
And brief its sharpest agony? Yet, fairest,
It is no theme for thee. Go in at once,
And think of it no more.

CLEMANTHE.

Not without thee.

Indeed thou art not well; thy hands are marble,
Thy eyes are fix'd; let me support thee, love,—
Ha! what is that gleaming within thy vest?
A knife! Tell me its purpose, Ion!

ION.

No;

My oath forbids.

CLEMANTHE.

An oath! O gentle Ion,
What can have link'd thee to a cause which needs
A stronger cement than a good man's word?
There's danger in it. Wilt thou keep it from me?

ION.

Alas, I must. Thou wilt know all full soon—

[*Voices call ION!*]

Hark, I am call'd!

CLEMANTHE.

Nay, do not leave me thus.

ION.

'Tis very sad [*voices again*!—I dare not stay—farewell!

[*Exit.*]

CLEMANTHE.

It must be to Adrastus that he hastes !
If by his hand the fated tyrant die,
Austere remembrance of the deed will hang
Upon his delicate spirit like a cloud,
And tinge its world of happy images
With hues of horror. Shall I to the palace,
And, as the price of my disclosure, claim
His safety ? No !—'Tis never woman's part
Out of her fond misgivings to perplex
The fortunes of the man to whom she cleaves ;
'Tis hers to weave all that she has of fair
And bright in the dark meshes of their web
Inseparate from their windings. My poor heart
Hath found its refuge in a hero's love,
Whatever destiny his generous soul
Shape for him ;—'tis its duty to be still,
And trust him till it bound or break with his. [Exit.

SCENE III.

A chamber in the Temple.

Enter MEDON, followed by ABRA.

MEDON.

My daughter not within the temple, say'st thou?
Abroad at such an hour? Sure not alone
She wander'd: tell me truly, did not Phocion
Or Ion bear her company? 'twas Ion—
Confess;—was it not he? I shall not chide,
Indeed I shall not.

ABRA.

She went forth alone;
But it is true that Ion just before
Had taken the same path.

MEDON.

It was to meet him.

I would they were return'd ; the night is grown
Of an unusual blackness. Some one comes—
Look if it be my daughter.

ABRA, *looking out.*

No ; young Irus,
The little slave, whose pretty tale of grief
Agenor, with so gracious a respect,
This morning told us.

MEDON.

Let him come ; he bears
Some message from his master.

[*Enter IRUS.*]

MEDON *to* IRUS.

Thou art pale ;
Has any evil happen'd to Agenor ?

IRUS.

No, my good lord ; I do not come from him ;

I bear to thee a scroll from one who now
Is number'd with the dead ; he was my kinsman,
But I had never seen him till he lay
Upon his death-bed ; for he left these shores
Long before I was born, and no one knew
His place of exile ;—on this mournful day
He landed, was plague-stricken, and expired.
My gentle master gave me leave to tend
His else unsolaced death-bed ;—when he found
The clammy chilness of the grave steal on,
He call'd for parchment, and with trembling hand,
That seem'd to gather firmness from its task,
Wrote earnestly ; conjured me take the scroll
Instant to thee ; and died.

[IRUS *gives a scroll to* MEDON.

MEDON, *reading the scroll.*

These are high tidings.

Abra ! is not Clemanthe come ? I long
To tell her all.

[*Enter CLEMANTHE.*]

MEDON.

Sit down, my pensive child.

Abra, this boy is faint ; see him refresh'd
With food and wine before thou lett'st him pass.

IRUS.

I have too long been absent from Agenor,
Who needs my slender help.

MEDON.

Nay, I will use
Thy master's firmness here, and use it so
As he would use it. Keep him prisoner, Abra,
Till he has done my bidding.

[*Exeunt ABRA and IRUS.*]

Now, Clemanthe,
Though thou hast play'd the truant and the rebel,
I will not be too strict in my award,
By keeping from thee news of one to thee

Most dear—nay, do not blush—I say most dear.

CLEMANTHE.

It is of Ion ;—no—I do not blush,
But tremble. O my father, what of Ion ?

MEDON.

How often have we guess'd his lineage noble !
And now 'tis proved. The kinsman of that youth
Was with another hired to murder him
A babe ;—they tore him from his mother's breast,
And to a sea-girt summit, where a rock
O'erhung a chasm by the surge's force
Made terrible, rush'd with him. As the gods
In mercy order'd it, the foremost ruffian
Who bore no burden, pressing through the gloom
In the wild hurry of his guilty purpose,
Trod at the extreme verge upon a crag
Loosen'd by summer from its granite bed,
And suddenly fell with it ;—with his fall
Sunk the base daring of the man who held

The infant ; so he placed the unconscious babe
Upon the spot where it was found by me ;
Watch'd till he saw the infant safe ; then fled,
Fearful of question ; and return'd to die.
That child is Ion ; whom dost guess his sire ?
The first in Argos.

CLEMANTHE.

Dost thou mean Adrastus ?
He cannot—must not—be that tyrant's son !

MEDON.

It is most certain. Nay, my thankless girl,
He hath no touch of his rash father's pride ;
For Nature, from whose genial lap he smiled
Upon us first, hath moulded for her own
The suppliant of her bounty ;—thou art bless'd ;
Thus, let me bid thee joy.

CLEMANTHE.

Joy, sayst thou—joy !

Then I must speak—he seeks Adrastus' life ;
And at this moment, while we talk, may stain
His soul with parricide.

MEDON.

Impossible !

Ion, the gentlest——

CLEMANTHE.

It is true, my father ;

I saw the weapon gleaming in his vest ;

I heard him call'd !

MEDON.

Shall I alarm the palace ?

CLEMANTHE.

No ; in the fierce confusion, he would fall

Before our tale could be his safeguard. Gods !

Is there no hope, no refuge ?

MEDON.

Yes, if Heaven

Assist us. I bethink me of a passage,
Which, fashion'd by a king in pious zeal,
That he might seek the altar of the god
In secret, from the temple's inmost shrine
Leads to the royal chamber. I have track'd it
In youth for pastime. Could I thread it now,
I yet might save him.

CLEMANTHE.

O make haste, my father:

Shall I attend thee?

MEDON.

No; thou wouldst impede
My steps;—thou art fainting; when I have lodged thee safe
In thy own chamber, I will light the torch,
And instantly set forward.

CLEMANTHE.

Do not waste

An instant's space on me ;—speed, speed, my father—

The fatal moments fly ; I need no aid ;—

Thou seest I am calm, quite calm.

MEDON.

The gods protect thee !

[*Exeunt severally.*]

END OF ACT III.

ACT THE FOURTH.

A C T I V.

SCENE I.

The Royal Chamber. ADRASTUS on a couch asleep.

Enter ION with the knife.

ION.

Why do I creep thus stealthily along
With thief-like steps? Am I not arm'd by Heaven
To execute its mandate on a king
Whom its halls doom'd? And shall I falter now,
While every moment that he breathes may crush
Some life else happy?—Can I be deceived,
By some foul passion, crouching in my soul,
Which takes a radiant form to lure me on?
Assure me, gods!—Yes; I have heard your voices;

For I dare pray ye now to nerve my arm

And see me strike ! [*He goes to the couch.*

He 's smiling in his slumber,

As if some happy thought of innocent days

Play'd at his heart-strings : must I scare it thence

With death's sharp agony ? He lies condemn'd

By the high judgment of supernal Powers,

And he shall know their sentence. Wake, Adrastus !

Collect thy spirits, and be strong to die !

ADRASTUS.

Who dares disturb my rest ? Guards ! Soldiers !

Recreants !

Where tarry ye ? Why smite ye not to earth

This bold intruder ?—Ha ! no weapon here !—

What wouldst thou with me, ruffian ? [*Rising.*

ION.

I am none,

But a sad instrument in Jove's great hand

To take thy life long forfeited—Prepare !

Thy hour is come !

ADRASTUS.

Villains! does no one hear?

ION.

Vex not the closing minutes of thy being
With torturing hope or idle rage ; thy guards,
Palsied with revelry, are scatter'd senseless,
While the most valiant of our Argive youths
Hold every passage by which human aid
Could reach thee. Present death is the award
Of Powers who watch above me while I stand
To execute their sentence.

ADRASTUS.

Thou !—I know thee—

The youth I spared this morning, in whose ear
I pour'd the secrets of my bosom. Kill me,
If thou darest do it ; but bethink thee first
How the grim memory of thy thankless deed

Will haunt thee to the grave !

ION.

It is most true ;

Thou sparedst my life, and therefore do the gods
Ordain me to this office, lest thy fall
Seem the chance forfeit of some single sin,
And not the great redress of Argos. Now—
Now, while I parley—Spirits that have left,
Within this hour, their plague-tormented flesh
To rot untomb'd, glide by and frown on me
Their slow avenger—and the chamber swarms
With looks of Furies—Yet a moment wait,
Ye dreadful prompters !—If there is a friend,
Whom dying thou wouldst greet by word or token,
Speak thy last bidding.

ADRASTUS. ♀

I have none on earth ;

If thou hast courage, end me !

ION.

Not one friend !

Most piteous doom !

ADRASTUS.

Art melted ?

ION.

If I am,

Hope nothing from my weakness ; mortal arms,

And eyes unseen that sleep not, gird us round,

And we shall fall together. Be it so !

ADRASTUS.

No ; strike at once ; my hour is come ; in thee

I recognise the minister of Jove,

And, kneeling thus, submit me to his power.

[ADRASTUS *kneels*.

ION.

Avert thy face.

ADRASTUS.

No; let me meet thy gaze;
For breathing pity lights thy features up
Into more awful likeness of a form
Which once shone on me;—and which now my sense
Shapes palpable—in habit of the grave,
Inviting me to the sad realm where shades
Of innocents, whom passionate regard
Link'd with the guilty, are content to pace
With them the margin of the inky flood
Mournful and calm;—'tis surely there;—she waves
Her pallid hand in circle o'er thy head,
As if to bless thee—and I bless thee too,
Death's gracious angel!—Do not turn away.

ION.

Gods! to what office have ye doom'd me!—now!

[ION raises his arm to stab ADRASTUS, who is kneeling, and gazes steadfastly upon him. The voice of MEDON is heard without, calling ION ! ION !—ION drops his arm.]

ADRASTUS.

Be quick, or thou art lost !

[As ION has again raised his arm to strike, MEDON rushes in behind him.]

MEDON.

Ion, forbear !

Behold thy son, Adrastus !

[ION stands for a moment stupified with horror, drops the knife, and falls senseless on the ground.]

ADRASTUS.

What strange words

Are these which call my senses from the death

They were composed to welcome ? Son ! 'tis false—

I had but one, and the deep wave rolls o'er him !

MEDON.

That wave received, instead of the fair nurseling,
One of the slaves who bore him from thy sight
In wicked haste to slay;—I'll give thee proofs.

ADRASTUS.

Great Jove, I thank thee!—raise him gently—proofs!
Are there not here the lineaments of her
Who made me happy once—the voice, now still,
That bade the long-seal'd fount of love gush out,
While with a prince's constancy he came
To lay his noble life down; and the sure,
The dreadful proof, that he whose guileless brow
Is instinct with her spirit, stood above me,
Arm'd for the traitor's deed?—It is my child!

[ION *reviving, sinks on one knee before* ADRASTUS.]

ION.

Father!

[*Noise without.*]

MEDON.

The clang of arms !

ION. [*Starting up.*]

They come ! they come !

They who are leagued with me against thy life.

Here let us fall !

ADRASTUS.

I will confront them yet ;

Within I have a weapon which has drank

A traitor's blood ere now ;—there will I wait them :

No power less strong than death shall part us now.

[*Exeunt ADRASTUS and ION as to an inner chamber.*]

MEDON.

Have mercy on him, gods, for the dear sake

Of your most single-hearted worshipper !

Enter CTESIPHON, CASSANDER, and others.

CTESIPHON.

What treachery is this—the tyrant fled,
And Ion fled too!—Comrades, stay this dotard
While I search yonder chamber.

MEDON.

Spare him, friends,—
Spare him to clasp awhile his new-found son ;
Spare him as Ion's father !

CTESIPHON.

Father ! yes—
That is indeed a name to bid me spare ;—
Let me but find him, gods !

[He rushes into the inner chamber.]

MEDON. *[To Cassander and the others.]*

Had ye but seen
What I have seen, ye would have mercy on him.

CRYTHES enters with soldiers.

Ha, soldiers ! hasten to defend your master ;

That way——

[As CRYTHES is about to enter the inner chamber,

CTESIPHON rushes from it with a bloody dagger and stops them.]

CTESIPHON.

It is accomplish'd ; the foul blot

Is wiped away. Shade of my murder'd father,

Look on thy son, and smile !

CRYTHES.

Whose blood is that ?

It cannot be the king's !

CTESIPHON.

It cannot be !

Think'st, thou foul minion of a tyrant's will,

He was to crush, and thou to crawl for ever ?

Look there, and tremble !

CRYTHES.

Wretch ! thy life shall pay
The forfeit of this deed.

[CRYTHES *and soldiers* seize CTESIPHON.]

[*Enter* ADRASTUS *mortally wounded, supported by* ION.]

ADRASTUS.

Here let me rest,—
In this old chamber did my life begin,
And here I'll end it : Crythes ! thou hast timed
Thy visit well, to bring thy soldiers hither
To gaze upon my parting.

CRYTHES.

To avenge thee ;—
Here is the traitor !

ADRASTUS.

Set him free at once—

Why do ye not obey me? Ctesiphon,
I gave thee cause for this;—believe me now
That thy true steel has made thy vengeance sure;
And as we now stand equal, I will sue
For a small boon—let me not see thee more.

CTESIPHON.

Farewell!

[*Exit* CTESIPHON.]ADRASTUS [*to CRYTHES and the soldiers.*]

Why do ye tarry here?

Begone!—still do ye hover round my couch?
If the commandment of a dying king
Is feeble, as a man who has embraced
His child for the first time since infancy,
And presently must part with him for ever,
I do adjure ye leave us!

[*Exeunt all but ION and ADRASTUS.*]

ION.

O my father,

How is it with thee now?

ADRASTUS.

Well; very well;—

Avenging Fate hath spent its utmost force

Against me; and I gaze upon my son

With the sweet certainty that nought can part us

Till all is quiet here. How like a dream

Seems the succession of my regal pomps

Since I embraced thy helplessness! To me

The interval hath been a weary one;

How hath it pass'd with thee?

ION.

But that my heart

Hath sometimes ached for the sweet sense of kindred,

I had enjoy'd a round of happy years

As cherish'd youth e'er knew.

ADRASTUS.

I bless the gods
That they have strewn along thy humble path
Delights unblamed ; and in this hour I seem
Even as I had lived so ; and I feel
That I shall live in thee, unless that curse—
O if it should survive me !

ION.

Think not of it ;
The gods have shed such sweetness in this moment,
That, howsoe'er they deal with me hereafter,
I shall not deem them angry. Let me call
For help to staunch thy wound ; thou art strong yet,
And yet may live to bless me. *(Exit)*

ADRASTUS.

Do not stir ;
My strength is ebbing fast, yet as it leaves me,
The spirit of my stainless days of love

Awakens ; and their images of joy,
Which at thy voice started from blank oblivion,
When thou wert strange to me, and then half-shown
Look'd sadly through the mist of guilty years,
Now glimmer on me in the lovely light
Which at thy age they wore. Thou art all thy mother's,
Her elements of gentlest virtue cast
In mould heroical.

ION.

Thy speech grows fainter ;
Can I do nothing for thee ?

ADRASTUS.

Yes ;—my son,
Thou art the best, the bravest, of a race
Of rightful monarchs ; thou must mount the throne
Thy ancestors have fill'd, and by great deeds
Efface the memory of thy fated sire,
And win the blessing of the gods for men
Stricken for him. Swear to me thou wilt do this,

And I shall die forgiven.

ION.

I will.

ADRASTUS.

Rejoice,

Sufferers of Argos ! I am growing weak,
And my eyes dazzle ; let me rest my hands,
Ere they have lost their feeling, on thy head.—
So ! So !—thy hair is glossy to the touch
As when I last enwreath'd its tiny curl
About my finger ; I did image then
Thy reign excelling mine ; it is fulfill'd,
And I die happy. Bless thee, king of Argos ! [Dies.

ION.

He 's dead ! and I am fatherless again.—
King did he hail me ? shall I make that word
A spell to bid old happiness awake
Throughout the lovely land that father'd me

In my forsaken childhood?

[He sees the knife on the ground, and takes it up.]

Most vain dream !

This austere monitor hath bid thee vanish

Ere half reveal'd. Come back, thou truant steel ;

Half of thy work the gods absolved thee from,

The rest remains ! Lie there !

[He puts the knife in his bosom. Shouts heard without.]

The voice of joy !

Is this thy funeral wailing ? O my father !

Mournful and brief will be the heritage

Thou leavest me ; yet I promised thee in death

To grasp it ;—and I will embrace it now.

Enter AGENOR and others.

AGENOR.

Does the king live ?

ION.

Alas ! in me. The son

Of him whose princely spirit is at rest,
Claims his ancestral honours.

AGENOR.

That high thought
Anticipates the prayer of Argos roused
To sudden joy. The sages wait without
To greet thee ; wilt confer with them to-night,
Or wait the morning ?

ION.

Now ;—the city's state
Allows the past no sorrow. I attend them. [Exeunt.]

SCENE II.

[*Before the gate of the city.*]

[PHOCION *on guard.*]

PHOCION.

Fool that I was to take this idle office
At most inglorious distance from the scene
Which shall be freedom's birth-place ; to endure
The phantasies of danger which the soul
Uncheer'd by action coldly dallies with
Till it begins to shiver ! Long ere this,
If Ion's hand be firm, the deed is past,
And yet no shout announces that the bonds
Of tyranny are broken. [Shouts at distance.

Hark ! 'tis done !—

Enter CTESIPHON.

All hail, my brother freeman !—art not so ?—
Thy looks are haggard—is the tyrant slain ?

Is liberty achieved?

CTESIPHON.

The king is dead;

This arm,—I bless the righteous Furies!—slew him.

PHOCION.

Did Ion quail then?

CTESIPHON.

Ion!—clothe thy speech

In phrase more courtly; he is king of Argos,

Accepted as the tyrant's son, and reigns.

PHOCION.

It cannot be; I can believe him born

Of such high lineage; yet he will not change

His own rich treasury of unruffled thoughts

For all the frigid glories that invest

The loveless state in which the monarch dwells

A terror and a slave.

[*Shouts again.*]

CTESIPHON.

Dost hear that shout ?

'Tis raised for him !—the craven-hearted world

Is ever eager thus to hail a lord,

And patriots smite for it in vain. Our soldiers,

From the base instinct of their slavish trade,

Which must be deck'd and master'd ; citizens

On wretched beds gaping for show ; and sages

Vain of a royal sophist, madly join

In humble prayer that he would deign to tread

Upon their necks, and he is pleased to grant it.

PHOCION.

He shall not grant it ! If my life, my sense,

My heart's affections—and my tongue's free scope

Wait the dominion of a mortal will,

What is the sound to me—whether my soul

Bears “ Ion ” or “ Adrastus ” burnt within it

As my soul's owner ? Ion tyrant ? No !

Grant me a moment's pleading with his heart,

Which has not known a selfish throb till now,
And thou shalt see him smile this greatness from him.

CTESIPHON.

Go teach the eagle when in azure heaven
He upward darts to seize his madden'd prey,
Shivering through the death-circle of its fear,
To pause and let it 'scape, and thou mayst win
Man to forego the sparkling round of power,
When it floats airily within his grasp.

PHOCION.

Why thus severe? Our nature's common wrongs
Affect thee not; and that which touch'd thee nearly
Is well avenged.

CTESIPHON.

Not while the son of him
Who smote my father reigns. I little guess'd
Thou wouldst require a prompter to awake
The memory of the oath so freshly sworn,

Or of the place assign'd to thee by lot,
Should our first champion fail to crush the race—
Mark me !—" the race " of him my arm has dealt with.
Now is the time ; the palace all confused,
And the prince dizzy with strange turns of fortune
To do thy part.

PHOCION.

Have mercy on my weakness !
If thou hadst known this comrade of my sports,
One of the same small household whom his mirth
Unfailing gladden'd ;—if a thousand times
Thou hadst, by strong prosperity made thoughtless,
Touch'd his unfather'd nature in its nerve
Of agony, and felt no chiding glance ;—
Hadst thou beheld him overtax his strength
To serve the wish his genial instinct guess'd,
Till his dim smile the weariness betray'd,
Which it would fain dissemble ;—hadst thou known
In sickness the sweet magic of his care,
Thou couldst not ask it.—Hear me, Ctesiphon !—

I had a deadly fever once, and slaves
Affrighted, fled me ;—he usurp'd their place,
And soothed my dull ear with discourse which grew
By nice degrees to ravishment, till pain
Seem'd an heroic sense, which made me kin
To the great deeds he pictured, and the brood
Of dizzy weakness flickering through the gloom
Of my small curtain'd prison caught the hues
Of beauty spangling out in glorious change ;
And it became a luxury to lie
And faintly listen. Canst thou bid me slay him ?

CTESIPHON.

The deed be mine. Thou 'lt not betray me ?

[*Going.*

PHOCION.

Hold !

If by our dreadful compact he must fall,
I will not smite him with my coward thought
Winging a distant arm ; I will confront him

L

Arm'd with delicious memories of our youth,
And pierce him through them all.

CTESIPHON.

Be speedy then !

PHOCION.

Fear not that I shall prove a laggard, charged
With weight of such a purpose.—Fate commands,
And I live now but to perform her bidding.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE III.

[*A Terrace in the Garden of the Palace by moonlight.*]

[*Enter ION and AGENOR*]

AGENOR.

Wilt thou not in to rest?

ION.

My rest is here—

Beneath the greatness of the heavens, which awes
My spirit, toss'd by sudden change, and torn
By various passions, to repose. Yet age
Requires more genial nourishment—pray seek it—
I will but stay thee to inquire once more
If any symptom of returning health
Bless the wan city?

AGENOR.

No—the perishing
Lift up their painful heads to bless thy name,
And their eyes kindle as they utter it ;
But still they perish.

ION.

So !—give instant order,
The rites which shall confirm me in my throne
Be solemnized to-morrow.

AGENOR.

How ! so soon,
While the more sacred duties to the dead
Remain unpaid ?

ION.

Let them abide my time—
They will not tarry long. I see thee gaze
With wonder on me—do my bidding now,

And trust me till to-morrow. Pray go in,
The night will chill thee else.

AGENOR.

Farewell, my lord ! [Exit.

ION,

Now all is stillness in my breast—how soon
To be displaced by more profound repose,
In which no thread of consciousness shall live
To feel how calm it is !—O lamp serene,
Do I lift up to thee undazzled eyes
For the last time ? Shall I enjoy no more
Thy golden haziness which seem'd akin
To my young fortune's dim felicity ?
And when it coldly shall embrace the urn
That shall contain my ashes, will no thought
Of all the sweet ones cherish'd by thy beams
Awake to tremble with them ? Vain regret !
The pathway of my duty lies in sunlight,
And I would tread it with as firm a step,

Though it should terminate in cold oblivion,
As if Elysian pleasures at its close
Gleam'd palpable to sight as things of earth.
Who passes there?

[*Enter PHOCION behind, who strikes at ION with a dagger.*]

PHOCION.

This to the king of Argos.

[*ION struggles with him, seizes the dagger, which he throws away.*]

ION.

I will not fall by thee, poor wavering novice
In the assassin's trade!—thy arm is feeble—

[*He confronts PHOCION.*]

Phocion!—was this well aim'd? thou didst not mean—

PHOCION.

I meant to take thy life, urged by remembrance

Of yesterday's great vow.

ION.

And couldst thou think

I had forgotten ?

PHOCION.

Thou ?

ION.

Couldst thou believe,

That one, whose nature had been arm'd to stop

The life-blood's current in a fellow's veins,

Would hesitate when gentler duty turn'd

His steel to nearer use ? To-morrow's dawn

Shall see me wield the sceptre of my fathers ;

Come, watch beside my throne, and, if I fail

In sternest duty which my country needs,

My bosom will be open to thy steel,

As now to thy embrace !

PHOCION.

Thus let me fall

Low at thy feet, and kneeling here receive
Forgiveness; do not crush me with more love
Than lies in the word "pardon."

ION.

And that word

I will not speak;—what have I to forgive?
A devious fancy, and a muscle raised
Obedient to its impulse! Dost thou think
The tracings of a thousand kindnesses,
Which taught me all I guess'd of brotherhood,
Are in the rashness of a moment lost?

PHOCION.

I cannot look upon thee; let me go,
And lose myself in darkness.

ION.

Nay, old playmate,

We part not thus—the duties of my state
Will shortly end our fellowship ; but spend
A few sweet minutes with me. Dost remember
How in a night like this we climb'd yon walls
Two vagrant urchins, and with tremulous joy
Skimm'd through these statue-border'd walks that gleam'd
In bright succession ? Let us tread them now ;
And think we are but older by a day,
And that the pleasant walk of yesternight
We are to-night retracing. Come, my friend !—
What drooping yet ! thou wert not wont to seem
So stubborn—cheerily, my Phocion—come ! [*Exeunt.*

END OF ACT IV.

ACT THE FIFTH.

A C T V.

SCENE I.

TIME.—THE MORNING OF THE SECOND DAY.

[*The Terrace of the Palace.*]

[*Two Soldiers on guard.*]

1 SOLDIER.

A stirring season, comrade! our new prince
Has leap'd as eagerly into his seat
As he had languish'd an expectant heir
Weary of nature's kindness to old age.
He was esteem'd a modest stripling;—strange,
That he should, with such reckless hurry, seize
The gaudy shows of power!

2 SOLDIER.

'Tis honest nature;

The royal instinct was but smouldering in him,
And now it blazes forth. I pray the gods
He may not give us cause to mourn his sire.

I SOLDIER.

No more ; he comes.

[*Enter ION.*]

ION.

Why do ye loiter here ?
Are all the statues deck'd with festal wreaths
As I commanded ?

I SOLDIER.

We have been on guard
Here by Agenor's order since the nightfall.

ION.

On guard ! Well, hasten now and see it done ;
I need no guards. [*Exeunt Soldiers.*]

The awful hour draws near ;

I am composed to meet it.—Phocion comes :

He will unman me ; yet he must not go,

Thinking his presence painful.

[*Enter PHOCION.*]

Friend, good morrow !

Thou play'st the courtier early.

PHOCION.

Canst thou speak

In that old tone of common cheerfulness,

That blithely promises delightful years,

And hold thy mournful purpose ?

ION.

I have drawn

From the selectest fountain of repose

A blessed calm ;—when I lay down to rest

I fear'd lest bright remembrances of childhood

Should with untimely visitation mock me ;

But deep and dreamless have my slumbers been.
If sight of thee renews the thoughts of life
Too busily ;—I prize the love that wakes them.

PHOCION.

O, cherish them, and let them plead with thee
To grant my prayer,—that thou wouldst live for Argos,
Not die for her ;—thy gracious life shall win
More than thy death the favour of the gods,
And charm the marble aspect of grim Fate
Into a blessed change : I, who am vow'd,
And who so late was arm'd Fate's minister,
Implore thee !

ION.

Speak to me no more of life ;
There is a dearer name I would recall—
Thou understand'st me—

Enter AGENOR.

AGENOR.

'Thou hast forgot to name

Who shall be bidden to this evening's feast ?

ION.

The feast !—most true ; I had forgotten it.

Bid whom thou wilt ; but let there be large store,

If our sad walls contain it, for the wretched

Whom hunger palsies. It may be few else

Will taste it with a relish. *[Exit* AGENOR.

*[ION resumes his address to PHOCION, and continues it,
broken by the interruptions which follow.]*

I would speak

A word of her who yester-morning rose

To her light duties with as blithe a heart

As ever yet its equal beating veil'd

In moveless alabaster ;—plighted now,

In liberal hour, to one whose destiny

M

Shall freeze the sources of enjoyment in it,
And make it heavy with the life-long pang
A widow'd spirit bears!—

Enter CLEON.

CLEON.

The heralds wait
To learn the hour at which the solemn games
Shall be proclaim'd.

ION.

The games!—yes, I remember
That sorrow's darkest pageantries give place
To youth's robustest pastimes—death and life
Embracing :—at the hour of noon.

CLEON.

The wrestlers
Pray thee to crown the victor.

ION.

If I live,

Their wish shall govern me.

[*Exit* CLEON.]

Could I recall

One hour, and bid thy sister think of me

With gentle sorrow as a playmate lost,

I should escape the guilt of having stopp'd

The pulse of hope in the most innocent soul

That ever passion ruffled. Do not talk

Of me as I shall seem to thy kind thoughts,

But harshly as thou canst, and if thou steal

From thy rich store of popular eloquence

Some bitter charge against the faith of kings,

'Twill be an honest treason.

Enter CASSANDER.

CASSANDER.

Pardon me,

If I entreat thee to permit a few

Of thy once-cherish'd friends to bid thee joy

Of that which swells their pride.

ION.

They'll madden me.—

Dost thou not see me circled round with care?

Urge me no more.

[*As CASSANDER is going, ION leaves PHOCION, and comes to him.*]

Come back, Cassander! see

How greatness frets the temper. Keep this ring—

It may remind thee of the pleasant hours

That we have spent together, ere our fortunes

Grew separate: and with thy gracious speech

Excuse me to our friends. [Exit CASSANDER.]

PHOCION.

'Tis time we seek

The temple.

ION.

Phocion! must I to the temple?

PHOCION.

There sacrificial rites must be perform'd
Before thou art enthroned.

ION.

Then I must gaze
On things which will arouse the struggling thoughts
I had subdued—perchance may meet with her
Whose name I dare not utter. I am ready. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

The Temple.

CLEMANTHE, ABRA.

ABRA.

Be comforted, dear lady ;—he must come
To sacrifice.

CLEMANTHE.

Recall that churlish word,
That stubborn “ *must*, ” that bounds my living hopes,
As with an iron circle. He *must* come !
How piteous is affection’s state that cleaves
To such a wretched prop ! I had flown to him
Long before this, but that I fear’d my presence
Might prove a burthen,—and he sends no word,
No token that he thinks of me ! Art sure
That he *must* come ? The hope has torture in it ;

Yet it is all my bankrupt heart has left
To feed upon.

ABRA.

I see him now with Phocion
Pass through the inner court.

CLEMANTHE.

He will not come
This way, then, to the place of sacrifice.
I can endure no more: speed to him, Abra;
And bid him, if he holds Clemanthe's life
Worthy a minute's loss, to seek me here.

ABRA.

Dear lady—

CLEMANTHE.

Do not answer me, but run,
Or I shall give you crowd of sycophants
To gaze upon my sorrow.

[*Exit* ABRA.]

It is hard ;

Yet I must strive to bear it, and find solace
In that high fortune which has made him strange.
He bends this way—but slowly—mournfully.
O, he is ill ; how has my slander wrong'd him !

Enter ION.

ION.

What wouldst thou with me, lady ?

CLEMANTHE.

Is it so ?

Nothing, my lord, save to implore thy pardon,
That the departing gleams of a bright dream,
From which I scarce had waken'd, made me bold
To crave a word with thee ;—but all are fled—
And I have nought to seek.

ION.

A goodly dream ;

But thou art right to think it was no more,
And study to forget it.

CLEMANTHE.

To forget it?

Indeed, my lord, I cannot wish to lose
What, being past, is all my future hath,
All I shall live for ; do not grudge me this,
The brief space I shall need it.

ION.

Speak not, fair one,

In tone so mournful, for it makes me feel
Too sensibly the hapless wretch I am,
That troubled the deep quiet of thy soul
In that pure fountain which reflected heaven,
For a brief taste of rapture.

CLEMANTHE.

Dost thou yet

Esteem it rapture then ? My foolish heart,

Be still! Yet wherefore should a crown divide us?

O, my dear Ion!—let me call thee so

This once at least—it could not in my thoughts

Increase the distance that there was between us,

When, rich in spirit, thou to strangers' eyes

Seem'd a poor foundling.

ION.

It must separate us!

Think it no harmless bauble, but a curse,

Will freeze the current in the veins of youth,

And from familiar touch of genial hand,

From household pleasures, from sweet daily tasks,

From airy thought free wanderer of the heavens,

For ever banish me!

CLEMANTHE.

Thou dost accuse

Thy state too hardly. It may give some room,

Some little space, amidst its radiant cares,

For love and joy to breathe in.

ION.

Not for me ;

My pomp must be most lonesome, far removed
From that sweet fellowship of human kind
The slave rejoices in: my solemn robes
Shall wrap me as a panoply of ice,
And the attendants who may throng around me
Shall want the flatteries which may basely warm
The sceptral thing they circle. Dark and cold
Stretches the path, which, when I wear the crown,
I needs must enter:—the great gods forbid
That thou shouldst follow in it !

CLEMANTHE.

O unkind !

And shall we never see each other ?

ION. [*After a pause.*]

Yes !

I have ask'd that dreadful question of the hills

That look eternal ; of the flowing streams
That lucid flow for ever ; of the stars,
Amid whose fields of azure my raised spirit
Hath trod in glory : all were dumb ; but now,
While I thus gaze upon thy living face,
I feel the love that kindles through its beauty
Can never wholly perish ;—we *shall* meet
Again, Clemanthe !

CLEMANTHE.

Bless thee for that name ;
Call me that name again ; thy words sound strangely,
Yet they breathe kindness. Shall we meet indeed ?
Think not I would intrude upon thy cares,
Thy councils, or thy pomps ;—to sit at distance,
To weave, with the nice labour which preserves
The rebel pulses even, from gay threads
Faint records of thy deeds, and sometimes catch
The falling music of a gracious word,
Or the stray sunshine of a smile, will be
Comfort enough :—do not deny me this ;

Or if stern fate compel thee to deny,
Kill me at once!

ION.

No; thou must live, my fair one:
There are a thousand joyous things in life,
Which pass unheeded in a life of joy
As thine hath been, till breezy sorrow comes
To ruffle it; and daily duties paid
Hardly at first, at length will bring repose
To the sad mind that studies to perform them.
Thou dost not mark me.

CLEMANTHE.

O, I do! I do!

ION.

If for thy brother's and thy father's sake
Thou art content to live, the healer Time
Will reconcile thee to the lovely things
Of this delightful world,—and if another,

A happier—no, I cannot bid thee love
Another!—I did think I could have said it,
But 'tis in vain.

CLEMANTHE.

Thou art mine own then still?

ION.

I am thine own! thus let me clasp thee; nearer;
O joy too thrilling and too short!

Enter AGENOR.

AGENOR.

My lord,
The sacrificial rites await thy presence.

ION.

I come.—One more embrace—the last, the last
In this world! Now farewell!

[*Exit.*

CLEMANTHE.

The last embrace!

Then he has cast me off!—no,—’tis not so;
Some mournful secret of his fate divides us;
I ’ll struggle to bear that, and snatch a comfort
From seeing him uplifted. I will look
Upon him in his throne; Minerva’s shrine
Will shelter me from vulgar gaze; I ’ll hasten,
And feast my sad eyes with his greatness there! [*Exit.*

SCENE III.

The Great Square of the City—on one side a throne of state prepared,—on the other an altar,—the statues hung with garlands.

Enter CTESIPHON and CASSANDER.

CTESIPHON.

Vex me no more, by telling me, Cassander,
Of his fair speech ; I prize it at its worth :
Thou 'lt see how he will act when seated firm
Upon the throne the craven tyrant fill'd,
Whose blood he boasts, unless some honest arm
Should shed it first.

CASSANDER.

Hast thou forgot the time
When thou thyself delightedst to foretell
His manhood's glory from his childish virtues ?

Let me not think thee one of those fond prophets,
Who are well pleased still to foretell success,
So it remain their dream.

CTESIPHON.

Thou dost forget
What has chill'd fancy and delight within me—
[*Music at a distance.*
Hark!—servile trumpets speak his coming—watch,
How power will change him. [They stand aside.

*The procession. Enter MEDON, AGENOR, PHOCION,
TIMOCLES, CLEON, Sages and People; ION last, in
royal robes. He advances amidst shouts, and speaks.*

ION.

I thank you for your greeting—Shout no more,
But in deep silence raise your hearts to Heaven,
That it may strengthen one so young and frail
As I am, for the business of this hour.
Must I sit here?

MEDON.

Permit thy earliest friend,
Who has so often propp'd thy tottering steps,
To lead thee to thy throne,—and thus fulfil
His fondest vision.

ION.

Thou art still most kind—

MEDON.

Nay, do not think of me—my son! my son!
What ails thee? when thou shouldst reflect the joy
Of Argos, the strange paleness of the grave
Marbles thy face.

ION.

Am I indeed so pale?

It is a solemn office I assume ;
Yet thus, with Phœbus' blessing, I embrace it.

[Sits on the throne.]

Stand forth, Agenor !

AGENOR.

I await thy will.

ION.

To thee I look as to the wisest friend
Of this afflicted people ;—thou must leave
Awhile the quiet which thy life hath earn'd,
To rule our councils ; fill the seats of justice
With good men not so absolute in goodness,
As to forget what human frailty is ;
And order my sad country.

AGENOR.

Pardon me—

ION.

Nay, I will promise 'tis my last request ;
Thou never yet refusedst me what I sought
In boyish wantonness, and shalt not grudge

Thy wisdom to me, till our state revive
From its long anguish ;—it will not be long
If Heaven approve me here. Thou hast all power
Whether I live or die.

AGENOR.

Die! I am old—

ION.

Death is not jealous of thy mild decay,
Which gently wins thee his; exulting Youth
Provokes the ghastly monarch's sudden stride,
And makes his horrid fingers quick to clasp
His shivering prey at noontide. Let me see
The captain of the guard.

CRYTHES.

I kneel to crave
Humbly the favour which thy sire bestow'd
On one who loved him well.

ION.

I cannot thank thee,
That wakest the memory of my father's weakness ;
But I will not forget that thou hast shared
The light enjoyments of a noble spirit,
And learn'd the need of luxury. I grant
For thee and thy brave comrades, ample share
Of such rich treasure as my stores contain,
To grace thy passage to some distant land,
Where, if an honest cause engage thy sword
May glorious laurels wreath it ! In our realm
We shall not need it longer.

CRYTHES.

Dost intend
To banish the firm troops before whose valour
Barbarian millions shrink appall'd, and leave
Our city naked to the first assault
Of reckless foes ?

ION.

No, Crythes !—in ourselves,
In our own honest hearts and chainless hands
Will be our safeguard ;—while we seek no use
Of arms, we would not have our children blend
With their first innocent wishes ; while the love
Of Argos and of justice shall be one
To their young reason ; while their sinews grow
Firm midst the gladness of heroic sports ;
We shall not ask to guard our country's peace
One selfish passion, or one venal sword.
I would not grieve thee ;—but thy valiant troop—
For I esteem them valiant—must no more
With luxury which suits a desperate camp
Infect us. See that they embark, Agenor,
Ere night.

CRYTHES.

My lord—

ION.

No more—my word hath pass'd.

Medon, there is no office I can add
To those thou hast grown old in; thou wilt guard
The shrine of Phœbus, and within thy home—
Thy too delightful home—befriend the stranger
As thou didst me;—there sometimes waste a thought
On thy spoil'd inmate !

MEDON.

Think of thee, my lord ?

Long shall we triumph in thy glorious reign—

ION.

Prithee no more. Argives ! I have a boon
To crave of you ;—whene'er I shall rejoin
In death the father from whose heart in life
Stern fate divided me, think gently of him !
For ye who saw him in his full-blown pride,

Knew little of affections crush'd within,
And wrongs which frenzied him ; yet never more
Let the great interests of the state depend
Upon the thousand chances that may sway
A piece of human frailty ! Swear to me
That ye will seek hereafter in yourselves
The means of sovereign rule :—our narrow space,
So happy in its confines, so compact,
Needs not the magic of a single name
Which wider regions may require to draw
Their interests into one ; but, circled thus,
Like a bless'd family by simple laws,
May tenderly be govern'd ; all degrees
Moulded together as one single form
Of nymph-like loveliness, which finest chords
Of sympathy pervading shall suffuse
In times of quiet with one bloom, and fill
With one resistless impulse, if the hosts
Of foreign power should threaten. Swear to me
That ye will do this !

MEDON.

Wherefore ask this now?—

Thou shalt live long ;—thy face, that late so pale
Appall'd me, now is flush'd with radiant joy,
And thine eyes kindle with the prophecy
Of lustrous years.

ION.

The gods approve me then !

Yet I will use the function of a king,
And claim obedience. Promise, if I leave
No issue, that the sovereign power shall live
In the affections of the general heart,
And in the wisdom of the best.

MEDON *and others.*

We swear it !

ION.

Hear and record the oath, immortal powers !

Now give me leave a moment to approach

That altar unattended. *[He goes to the altar.]*

Gracious gods !

In whose mild service my glad youth was spent,

Look on me now ;—and if there is a Power,

As at this solemn time I feel there is,

Beyond ye, that hath breathed through all your shapes

The spirit of the beautiful that lives

In earth and heaven ;—to ye I offer up

This conscious being, full of life and love

For my dear country's welfare. Let this blow

End all her sorrows !

[Stabs himself, and falls. CTESIPHON rushes to catch him.]

Ctesiphon, thou art

Avenged, and wilt forgive me.

CTESIPHON.

Thou hast pluck'd

The poor disguise of hatred from my soul,

And made me feel how shallow is the wish

Of vengeance. Could I die to save thee !

CLEMANTHE *rushes forward.*

CLEMANTHE.

Hold!

Let me support him—stand away—indeed
I have best right, although ye know it not,
To cling to him in death.

ION.

This is a joy
I did not hope for—this is sweet indeed.—
Bend thine eyes on me!

CLEMANTHE.

And for this it was
'Thou wouldst have wean'd me from thee! Couldst thou
think
I would be so divorced?

ION.

Thou art right, Clemanthe,—

It was a shallow and an idle thought ;
'Tis past ; no show of coldness frets us now ;
No vain disguise, my girl. Yet thou wilt think
On that which, when I feign'd, I truly said —
Wilt thou not, sweet one ?

CLEMANTHE.

I will treasure all.

Enter IRUS.

IRUS.

I bring you glorious tidings—Ha ! no joy
Can enter here.

ION.

Yes—is it as I hope ?

IRUS.

The pestilence abates.

ION. [*Springs on his feet.*]

Do ye not hear?

Why shout ye not?—ye are strong—think not of me;

Hearken! the curse my ancestry had spread

O'er Argos is dispell'd!—Agenor, give

This gentle youth his freedom, who hath brought

Sweet tidings that I shall not die in vain—

And Medon! cherish him as thou hast one

Who dying blesses thee;—my own Clemanthe!

Let this console thee also—Argos lives—

The offering is accepted—all is well!

[*Dies.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

SONNETS.

S O N N E T S.

I.

EVENING SERVICE

PERFORMED BY DR. VALPY AT READING SCHOOL.

THERE is a holy magic in that tone,
Can wake from Memory's selectest cell
The hour when first upon my heart it fell
Like dew from heaven :—the years that since have flown
Seem airy dreams ;—yet not of self alone
Those sacred strains are eloquent ; they tell
Of numbers temper'd by their simple spell
In boyhood's unreflecting prime to own
Their kindred with their fellows—best of lore !—
Who to this spot, as Persians to the East,
Turn reverential thoughts from every shore
Which holds them ; nor forbear till life hath ceased
With child-like love a blessing to implore
On thee, mild Charity's unspotted Priest !

II.

THE FORBURY, AT READING,

VISITED ON A MISTY EVENING IN AUTUMN.

SOFT uplands, that in boyhood's earliest days
Seem'd mountain-like and distant, fain once more
Would I behold you ; but the autumn hoar
Hath veil'd your pensive groves in evening haze ;
Yet do I wait till on my searching gaze
Your outline lives—more dear than if ye wore
An April sunset's consecrating rays—
For, even thus the images of yore
Which ye awaken glide from misty years
Dream-like and solemn, and but half unfold
Their tale of glorious hopes, religious fears,
And visionary schemes of giant mould ;
Whose dimmest trace the world-worn heart reveres,
And, with love's grasping weakness, strives to hold.

III.

ON HEARING THE SHOUTS OF THE PEOPLE

AT THE READING ELECTION OF THE SUMMER 1826, AT A
DISTANCE.

HARK ! from the distant town the long acclaim
On the charm'd silence of the evening breaks
With startling interruption ;—yet it wakes
Thought of that voice of never-dying fame
Which on my boyish meditation came
Here, at an hour like this ;—my soul partakes
A moment's gloom, that yon fierce contest slakes
Its thirst of high emprise and glorious aim :
Yet wherefore ? Feelings that from heaven are shed
Into these tenements of flesh, ally
Themselves to earthly passions, lest, unfed
By warmth of human sympathies, they die ;
And shall—earth's fondest aspirations dead—
Fulfil their first and noblest prophecy.

IV.

VIEW OF THE VALLEY OF READING,

FROM TILEHURST, AT THE CLOSE OF THE SAME ELECTION.

Too long have I regarded thee, fair vale,
But as a scene of struggle which denies
All pensive joy ; and now with childhood's eyes
In old tranquillity, I bid thee hail ;
And welcome to my soul thy own sweet gale
Which wakes from loveliest woods the melodies
Of long-lost fancy—Never may there fail
Within thy circlet, spirits born to rise
In honour—whether won by Freedom rude
In her old Spartan majesty, or wrought
With partial, yet no base regard, to brood
O'er usages by time with sweetness fraught ;
Be thou their glory-tinted solitude,
The cradle and the home of generous thought !

V.

TO THE THAMES AT WESTMINSTER,

IN RECOLLECTION OF THE BANKS OF THE SAME RIVER

AT CAVERSHAM, NEAR READING.

WITH no cold admiration do I gaze
Upon thy pomp of waters, matchless stream !
But home-sick fancy kindles with the beam
That on thy lucid bosom coyly plays ;
And glides delighted through thy crystal ways,
Till on her eye those wave-fed poplars gleam,
Beneath whose shade her first ethereal maze
She fashion'd ; where she traced in clearest dream
Thy mirror'd course of wood-enshrined repose
Besprent with island haunts of spirits bright ;
And widening on—till, at the vision's close,
Great London, only then a name of might
For childish thought to build on, proudly rose
A rock-throned city clad in heavenly light.

VI.

TO THE SAME RIVER.

I MAY not emulate their lofty aim,
Who, in divine imagination, bold,
With mighty hills and streams communion hold,
As living friends ; and scarce I dare to claim
Acquaintance with thee in thy scenes of fame,
Wealthiest of Rivers ! though in days of old
I loved thee where thy waters sylvan roll'd,
And in some sense would deem thee yet the same.
As love perversely cleaves to some old mate
Estranged by fortune ; in his very pride
Seems lifted ; waxes in his greatness great ;
And silent hails the lot it prophesied,—
Content to think in manhood's palmy state
Some lingering traces of the child abide.

VII.

TO W. C. MACREADY, ESQ.

ON HIS PERFORMANCE OF WERNER, IN LORD BYRON'S
TRAGEDY OF THAT NAME.

O LEARNED in Affection's thousand ways !
I thought thy art had proved its happiest power,
When thou didst bend above the opening flower
Of sweet Virginia's beauty, and with praise
Measured in words but fineless in the gaze
Of the proud sire, her gentle secret won :
Or when the patriot archer's hardy son
Was school'd by doting sternness for the hour
Of glorious peril ; but the just designs
Were ready : now thy soul's affections glow,
By thy own genius train'd, through frigid lines,
And make a scorner's bloodless fancy show
When Love disdain'd round its cold idol twines.
How mighty are its weakness and its woe !

VIII.

FAME—THE SYMBOL AND PROOF OF IMMORTALITY.

THE names that slow Oblivion have defied,
And passionate Ambition's wildest shocks
Stand in lone grandeur, like eternal rocks,
To cast broad shadows o'er the silent tide
Of Time's unebbing flood, whose waters glide,
To ponderous darkness from their secret spring,
And, bearing on each transitory thing,
Leave those old monuments in loneliest pride.
There stand they—fortresses uprear'd by man,
Whose earthly frame is mortal; symbols high
Of life unchanging,—strength that cannot die;
Proofs that our nature is not of a span,
But of immortal essence, and allied
To life and joy and love unperishing.

THE END.



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